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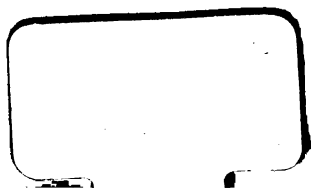


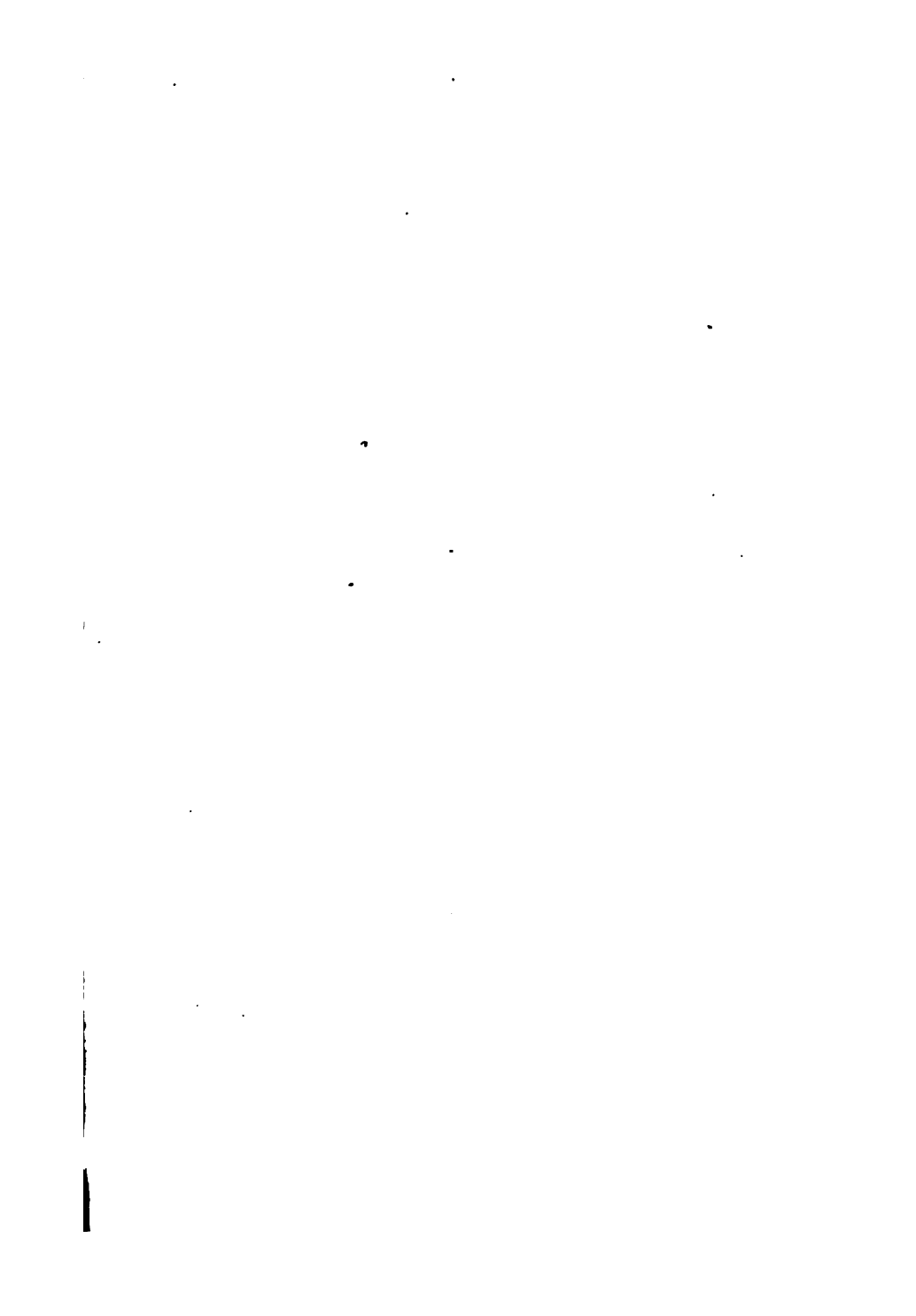
SCENES IN THE  
LIFE OF CHILDREN  
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‘WHY DID YOU GET DOWN THE SUGAR?’—P. 43.

# GREAT AND SMALL.

BEING SCENES IN THE LIFE OF CHILDREN.

*FROM THE FRENCH OF MADAME MADELEINE LAROQUE,*

BY

HARRIET POOLE.

*ILLUSTRATED WITH 61 ENGRAVINGS BY BERTALL.*



GRIFFITH AND FARRAN,

SUCCESSORS TO NEWBERRY AND HARRIS,

WEST CORNER OF ST. PAUL'S CHURCHYARD, LONDON.

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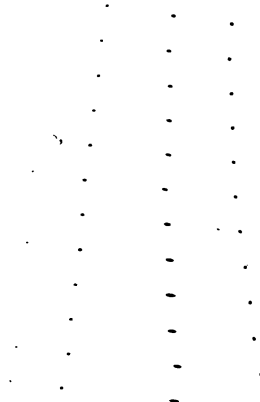


'WHY DID YOU GET DOWN THE SUGAR?'—P. 43.

GEORGE

BEING SCENE

PLATE 1



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## GREAT AND SMALL.

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### CHAPTER I.

#### *A MARRIAGE AND A FOOTSTOOL.*

‘WHY do people marry? I don’t see any fun at all in it.’

Such were the words of a little boy, who was sitting at his mother’s feet on a footstool in a small house, or rather ‘appartement,’ in the Rue St. Lazare, Paris. His hands were resting on his knees, and he was contemplating very gravely, and rather sadly, a doll



representing Punch, which, headless and armless, lay on the floor. As Mrs. de Flavier did not at once answer his question, the little boy, still in the same posture, repeated : 'Mamma, why *do* people want to marry ?'

Mrs. de Flavier smiled, and placing her hand softly on Harry's fair hair, she replied without hesitation :

'Your Uncle Bernard and Alice want to marry because they love each other.'

'But I love you very much, and yet I don't want to marry you!' cried Harry, half surprised, half angry, springing up, and coming to lean against his mother.

Mrs. de Flavier could hardly help laughing.

'That is not the same thing,' she said, smiling.

Harry was not smiling. He was thinking silently ; but after a pause he rose and said decidedly :

'Well, then, I don't like people to love each other !' This assertion, instead of

calming him, seemed rather to excite his sense of the personal injury he was suffering; for he went on, counting off on his fingers in a melancholy tone the objects of his indignation, 'My Punch is broken,—there's his head under the table; my horse has lost its tail; and my pinafore has got a hole in it!'

Harry's voice was beginning to tremble, and his eyes to fill with tears, when his mother drew him to her, and laughing said :

'Poor boy! you are indeed to be pitied. Come and tell me your troubles, and what connection there is between your uncle's marriage and your Punch.'

'When Uncle Bernard is here, Cousin Alice doesn't come and play with me. She promised to stick in my horse's tail again, and to mend Punch's head. I've spit upon it, but it doesn't hold.'

'Cousin Alice can't be always thinking of you, darling. She has spoilt you all; but now you and Elizabeth and Pauline must

expect her time to be less taken up with you. She will not live with us much longer, for Uncle Bernard is going to carry her off altogether soon.'

'I don't like Uncle Bernard!' and Harry stamped his foot angrily; 'I don't like Uncle Bernard! Cousin Alice is not his, and he has no right to take her away!'

'What do I hear?' asked a merry voice outside the door, which was a little ajar. 'Not like Uncle Bernard? A kind uncle who tosses you up to the ceiling, who goes on all fours on the carpet'—

The little boy turned round and saw his uncle standing with folded arms and knit brow, trying very hard to look angry.

'A kind uncle who cuts out little paper figures for you; who lets you make a ladder of his arms and legs, even when he has on a new coat; an uncle who'—

Harry was but half convinced, although he felt the enormity of his crime.

‘Why do you want to take Cousin Alice away?’ he said at last, feeling that he must respond in some way to his uncle’s terrible glances.

‘Listen, my boy,’ and Bernard de Flavier took his nephew on his knee; ‘Cousin Alice cannot stay here. If you wish to take her away, you may do so; otherwise, I shall.’

‘But why can’t she stay here?’

‘I can’t explain that to you, you wouldn’t understand. It is enough for you to know she cannot stay here; so, if you have anywhere to put her’—

‘Am I the fortunate parcel which is being so unceremoniously disposed of?’ asked Miss Alice Dareste as she entered the room.

Bernard made a sign to her not to move; Harry had heard nothing.

‘Well, my boy?’

‘I have nowhere,’ answered the child sadly.

‘Then I take her. Ask her what she thinks. I am sure she would rather come with me.’

Harry ran up to his cousin, exclaiming :

‘Do you really wish to go away? Is it quite true?’

‘Your uncle is very naughty,’ said the girl, laughing. ‘But come, don’t let us trouble about partings; let’s see if we can’t mend Mr. Punch,—he is in a sad state!’

With that, Miss Dareste sat down on the carpet, and contrived, by means of kisses and medical attentions, to soothe Harry’s mind, and to restore to health his broken toys.

Mr. and Mrs. de Flavier had been living for some years at Paris, when they received one morning a letter telling them that a cousin of theirs had just died, leaving an only daughter with very little fortune. Miss Dareste was only nineteen, so it was impossible she should live alone. Her mother had chosen Mr. de Flavier to act as her guardian, begging him and his wife to receive into their home ‘her dear daughter Alice, who would reward them doubly for their trouble on her account.’

Mr. and Mrs. de Flavier seldom hesitated where duty was concerned. They did not now stop to think whether the presence of a stranger amongst them would not interfere in manifold ways with their hitherto peaceful and happy life; and it never occurred to them to wonder whether Alice Daresté were really as charming as her mother represented her.

Two days later, Miss Daresté received a pressing and affectionate letter from Mrs. de Flavier, inviting her to leave La Vendée and come and live with the surviving members of her family. This letter was to Alice like healing balm. She was feeling completely isolated; and the sad prospect of having no one to love, or to be loved by, increased the void and the intense grief which the loss of her mother had caused her. She accepted the kind offer as freely as it had been made, not dwelling on the pros and cons there might be, feeling only a very natural regret at leaving a place where she had lived so happily with

her mother for many years, a fellow-feeling and perfect sympathy existing between them, such as few relationships other than that of mother and daughter can afford.

Bernard de Flavier, who was some years younger than his brother, was the first to object. He lived in bachelor's lodgings, but not a day passed without his dropping in more than once to see Mrs. de Flavier; and the evenings were pleasantly spent in reading or conversation. Bernard foresaw that Miss Dareste's arrival would cause all sorts of changes in their manner of life, so he did not look forward to it with very great impatience.

'Don't you see, Helen, we shall have to talk of very different things then; we shall not be able to discuss any subject. Either she will dislike music and reading, or else she will deafen us all with her scales and exercises.'

'If so, we can stop our ears with cotton-wool. But I am not of your opinion, and I intend to find out your Cousin Alice's good

points. Wait a little, and we shall see. I wager that in a month's time you will be untiring in your praise of her, and perhaps even'—

Mrs. de Flavier concluded her reflections to herself, and her brother-in-law did not care to pursue the matter further.

Three days later Miss Dareste arrived, and in spite of all his protestations, Bernard de Flavier was obliged to confess that she was charming. Alice liked reading, practised her scales and exercises in solitude, and sang very nicely. She had a pretty figure, magnificent brown eyes, and—how it happened I cannot tell, but six months after her arrival, Bernard de Flavier declared that he could not live any longer without her, and Alice answered that she would try to live with him.

We have already seen that Harry was far from pleased at the thought of his uncle's marriage. His two sisters, Elizabeth and Pauline, the former older, the latter younger



than himself, fully shared his sentiments. Since she had been with them, Alice had won the love of the children as well as that of their parents. She was always ready to amuse them, and she relieved Mrs. de Flavier of a good deal of care and anxiety.



At length the time for the wedding drew near; and in spite of her good-nature, Miss Daresté was obliged sometimes to leave her

little cousins to their own devices, in order to attend to the multitudinous and indispensable preparations for the coming event. Elizabeth did not conceal her displeasure, and her uncle's persuasive tones had no effect upon her.

'Can't you see what an immense gain it will be to you?' repeated Bernard, who, surrounded by the three children, was sitting by the drawing-room fire. 'You have never had an aunt, and now you will have one. What is a cousin compared with an aunt? I should be delighted if I were you.'

'I don't want an aunt,' said Elizabeth, who was standing behind her uncle with her arms folded, looking very grave.

'I like Cousin Alice much better,' added Pauline.

'Besides, we *have* got an aunt,' cried Harry in triumph,—'that old lady who lives in the country, whom we have been to see twice!'

Bernard de Flavie got up, rubbing his forehead, and saying to himself: 'I had for-

gotten all about her. Will nothing ever convince these children ?'

That evening there was a dinner-party ; and Pauline had good cause to remember it all her life, on account of a dreadful thing which happened. The children went down to dessert,—Harry highly delighted with a pretty embroidered nankeen frock his mother had made him, and Elizabeth and Pauline looking very respectfully and admiringly at their new pink sashes. The dessert went off very well, and every one had returned to the drawing-room. No particular attention was paid to the children ; they had been good all day, had not soiled their brown holland pinafores, and consequently had a high opinion of their virtue. Alas ! the evening which had begun so well was destined to end in a disaster. Elizabeth, Harry, and Pauline were careering about among the chairs and sofas, when suddenly they spied the hats of two or three gentlemen, left by their owners on

the carpet. Suddenly a bright idea seized Pauline, who was first.

‘What a nice little stool that would make!’ cried she.

No one was near to stop her; no good fairy intervened to prevent her committing a crime. She advanced resolutely, and choosing what seemed to her the prettiest hat, she sat down upon it in triumph. Harry and Elizabeth were watching her, and, charmed with this delightful invention, they were just preparing to follow their little sister’s example, when suddenly up she jumped in a great hurry, and turned in a fright towards her ‘nice little stool.’ Great, complete, and irreparable was the damage done to it! Pauline had felt it giving way under her, but she had never dreamt of such a dire misfortune. The hat was all out of shape; nothing was visible but a series of wrinkles and lumps, to which the name of hat could no longer be applied. Elizabeth, Harry, and Pauline stood, over-

come with terror and perfectly silent, before the remains of the unlucky stool. Very likely their silence attracted attention, for they heard before long what seemed to them a terrible voice saying :



‘Albert, do go and see what the children are about behind the sofa. They seem to me very quiet.’

Three screams were heard simultaneously. Quick as lightning the children disappeared through the open door and escaped into an

adjoining room. Pauline never knew how the crushed hat had been discovered, and took care not to ask the reason of the first exclamations of horror which burst forth on all sides when the misdeed had come to light. Without loss of time, and assisted by Elizabeth and Harry, she slipped behind a curtain which hung against the wall, completely forgetting that she would produce an unnatural excrescence in it, and so betray her presence. Scarcely had she, as she thought, concealed herself, than her father was seen approaching, and with him a rather cross-looking old gentleman, whom she had already noticed in the dining-room, and who had at first sight inspired her with awe.

It would be impossible to describe all that passed through the poor child's mind during the next two minutes. If she had been told that the old gentleman was going to eat her up, to grind her to powder, or to wear her as a hat for the rest of his life, she would

have had nothing to offer in self-defence. No punishment seemed great enough for such a crime.

‘Who has spoiled this hat?’ asked Mr. de Flavier sternly.

‘I can’t tell,’ answered Harry with energy.

‘Elizabeth, was it you?’

‘No, I didn’t spoil it,’ said the little girl; and then she continued with confusion, ‘I am going to mamma.’

Elizabeth did not wish to betray her sister, but she did not like difficulties, and preferred to avoid them.

Alas! in spite of the fidelity of her two companions, Pauline could not remain any longer undiscovered. One glance at her hiding-place sufficed to solve the mystery. A curtain could not have a great lump in the middle unless some one was behind it. The old gentleman came nearer, made the culprit come out of concealment, and said, in what sounded to her a very angry voice :



‘It is you that have spoiled my hat.’—P. 27.



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‘Well, young lady, it is you that have spoiled my hat?’

Pauline’s only answer was a very soft ‘Yes.’

Perhaps the old gentleman was diverted by her frightened and anxious face, for he burst out laughing, and lifting her on to his knee, he asked her how she had managed it.

‘It was a stool,’ she answered, this time rather more boldly, but still almost inaudibly.

‘A stool! my hat a stool?’ cried her accuser; and he laughed so much that Pauline looked at him with the greatest astonishment. She began to regain courage—no punishment seemed likely to follow; and at last the old gentleman left her, advising her for the future to sit on chairs rather than hats.

The children had gone through too much that evening to wish to return to the drawing-room. Pauline, especially, was only too glad to hide her face and the confusion

and dread she had suffered, under the bed-clothes.

Never again did any of the three children for one moment mistake a hatter for an upholsterer; but the impressions of their young days did not quickly fade away, and Pauline never looked at a gentleman's tall hat without a mixture of respect and fear, inspired by the adventures of her early years.





## CHAPTER II.

### *THE DEPARTURE.*

THE wedding was over, Uncle Bernard and Aunt Alice were gone, and all three children had had tender and affectionate letters from them, with the address of each on the envelope, which had contributed somewhat to soothe the sorrow of the parting.

‘Besides, they are coming back again,’ repeated Elizabeth, ‘and then they will stay.’

‘But they won’t live in the same house with

us; they will have one all to themselves,' returned Pauline sadly.

'What does that matter?' cried Harry. 'We will tell Uncle Bernard to go home by himself, and to leave Aunt Alice with us. Her room is all ready. Do you think he will?'

'No, no; or else he wouldn't have taken her away.'

'How silly you are, Elizabeth! He has taken her for a journey; but if she wants to come back, no one can hinder her.'

'Mamma said that Uncle Bernard loved Cousin Alice, and that people marry because they love each other, and when they are married they go away.'

'They *do* go away, but not to stay,' cried Harry, getting angry. 'Besides, no one can mend my horse's tail so well as Aunt Alice.'

This was probably an all-convincing reason in the eyes of the two little sisters. At all events, they held their tongues, and did not

say that they knew their aunt was gone for good.

Some days later, Mrs. de Flavier called the children into her room. She had a letter in her hand, and was surrounded by straw hats and small frocks and pinafores.

‘Children, what do you think of going to live in the country, amidst fields and farm-houses, in a house with a large garden?’

‘What! With Aunt Aubry? How delightful!’ cried Elizabeth, Harry, and Pauline at once. ‘Shall we keep fowls?’ ‘Shall I be able to float my boat on the pond?’ ‘Will there be lots of violets?’

These questions followed each other with amazing rapidity, the children meanwhile climbing on to their mother’s knee, or scrambling over the sofa on which she was seated.

‘I am very glad you are so pleased at the prospect, for we start in a fortnight’s time, and then we shall never return to Paris for any length of time.’

‘Oh, how nice! how delightful!’

‘We shall be able to run about without having our hand held!’

‘Are there any children at Aunt Aubry’s?’

‘No,’ said Mrs. de Flavier; ‘but perhaps we shall find a little brother or sister there for you.’

‘A little brother! And where will he come from?’

‘You can put that question to all the flowers in the garden when we are at La Ronceraye. All I can tell you is, that God will perhaps give you a little brother or sister before very long.’

What with this promise, and the thought of going to live in the country, the children did not give their parents much peace. They announced that they were packing up, and were always taking a quantity of little parcels to their nurse, mysteriously done up with string, and which, when opened, were found to contain only odds and ends of wool, or

scraps of paper and stuff. The nurse wisely threw them into the fire; and the children never thought for a minute that they would find their treasures considerably reduced when they reached La Ronceraye.

One day they were sitting on the floor, carefully tying up a last parcel, which was destined to share the same fate as its predecessors, when their attention was attracted to the conversation of the nurses.

‘There will be a good deal to pay for dilapidations. Look, Lucy, at the holes and scratches on the wainscot; it is quite covered with them.’

‘Oh,’ said Lucy, ‘children are ruination. There will be lots to pay for all the mischief these have done. Master *will* be angry when he sees all these holes!’

‘Will he mind much?’ asked Elizabeth.

‘He won’t be pleased, of course, at having to pay for every hole and every spot there is.’



‘And Loulou’s house?’ whispered Pauline to Harry.

Elizabeth turned and said softly :

‘Hush, hush ! nurse knows nothing about it.’

The three children rose quickly, and ran into a room where they kept their toys, and where they were accustomed to spend whole days among their treasures. In one dark corner was a table ; when the children reached it, they crept under it on all fours.

‘Each hole has to be paid for, and papa will think there are a great many more than there ought to be!’ repeated Elizabeth. Too many holes? How was it that the servants when they swept the room had not been astonished to find the floor strewn with plaster thick as dust, and had never reflected that when there is plaster on the ground, it is probable that something is the matter with the wall ?

Pauline possessed a little pasteboard dog, called Loulou. Now a dog must have a

kennel ; and the hole, imperceptible at first, had gone on getting bigger and deeper, sometimes by the aid of Harry's knife, sometimes by that of Elizabeth's spade, till at length Loulou had a good-sized house, well sheltered from the inclemency of the weather. Fortunately, Loulou was not very big ; but the kennel looked like a gulf now it had to be filled up.

'How *are* we stop it up ?' said the children over and over again.

'I know ; I will go and get something,' cried Pauline all of a sudden.

She ran out of the room, and did not come back for a long while. When at last she did return to the others under the table, her white pinafore was all wet ; the materials she had brought were damp. Elizabeth and Harry could hardly suppress their laughter. They spoke low, they worked, they stopped up the hole. Great was the children's joy when, an hour later, the kennel was no more. Nothing

remained on the wall but a whitish mark ; there was not a trace of a hole ! The children rose triumphant, and returned to their parcel, which, an hour later, was committed to the flames, just as they thought it was safely packed up.

It was near dinner-time. Elizabeth, Harry, and Pauline were on their way to their mother's room, when they heard Mr. de Flavier's voice in his dressing-room.

'Helen, do you know what has become of my soap ? I wanted to wash my hands before dinner, and the soap-bowl is empty.'

Mrs. de Flavier rose quickly.

'Mine is gone too,' she said. 'What could the servants have been thinking of this morning ? I will ring the bell.'

Lucy answered the bell, saying as she entered the room :

'Does Madame know why the soap has disappeared from all the rooms ? I have none to wash the young ladies with.'

Mr. de Flavier looked at his wife.

‘I declare there is an epidemic,’ he said, laughing. ‘There must be some one here very fond of soap.’



‘No one in the house has any,’ said Lucy.

Mrs. de Flavier said nothing. She was looking at the children, whose red cheeks showed they were not quite as much in the

dark as their parents as to the fate of the soap.

‘Have you touched it, children?’ she asked.

‘We thought we had better fill up Loulou’s hole,’ said Elizabeth confusedly.

‘And what did you fill it up with?’ cried Mr. de Flavier.

‘With soap,’ said Harry, ashamed.

‘Who is Loulou? and where was his hole?’

‘Loulou is my dog, and we made him a house—only a very small one, papa—in the wall,’ said Pauline.

‘In the wall! You mean to say you made a hole in the wall to keep your dog in? Really, these children are out of their mind!’

Mr. de Flavier tried to look very severe, but he looked so near laughing that the children were reassured. Mrs. de Flavier could scarcely contain herself; and she asked the children why they had stopped up the hole with soap, of all things.

‘Because it was rather soft; and then we did not want to make a noise because of nurse. She doesn’t like Loulou, and didn’t know he had a house.’

‘I do believe that if we put the children in an iron house, they would manage to pull it to pieces,’ said Mr. de Flavier. ‘Listen, now. If you ever do such a thing again, I will put you all on the spit as they do chickens!’

‘Not chickens, papa; partridges!’

‘Why partridges?’

‘Because that was what Aunt Alice said when we undid her knitting. But we will not do it again, papa; we promise we won’t!’

‘Besides, Loulou has only got one leg now,’ murmured Pauline.

Mrs. de Flavier laughed as the nurse carried off the children.

‘Oh, now it has come out! Loulou has only one leg now, so he is no longer worthy

to have a house. The next piece of mischief will be in quite a new style.'

'I shall expect them to be more careful at my aunt's,' said Mr. de Flavier. 'She is goodness itself; but her patience will give way if they make dog-kennels in the walls of La Ronceraye.'

'The children will have the garden to play in at La Ronceraye, and I hope that will tend to diminish the number of their unlucky inventions.'

La Ronceraye was the name of a beautiful country-house in the midst of a large estate, which till then had been managed by Mrs. Aubry, Mr. de Flavier's aunt. Mr. Aubry had been dead for ten years; but his wife did not like to leave the woods and fields which he had loved, and which had been his great interest and occupation from his youth. She was a good manager, and understood business; her poorer neighbours were devoted to her; and the estate had not suffered from the death

of Mr. Aubry,—the woods were in good condition, the farm well stocked, and the meadows filled with horned cattle were the admiration of all who saw them. But Mrs. Aubry had been gradually getting feeble ; one illness after another had undermined her health. She felt lonely and isolated, and soon began to see that the property did not bring in so much as formerly, because she was unable to attend to things herself. So she bethought herself of her nephews, of whom she was very fond, and wrote to Mr. Albert de Flavier to say that he would be doing her a great service if he would come and live in the country with his wife and children. She offered to let her farm to him, and they were all to live with her. She added : ‘Living is not so dear here as at Paris ; I shall be able to help you in many ways ; and I shall fancy I have my sons and grandchildren with me.’

Mr. and Mrs. de Flavier were some time making up their minds to accept their aunt’s



offer and go and live with her, educating their children themselves. At length they did so. Mr. Bernard de Flavier and his young wife had also been invited ; but he could not yet make up his mind. He only promised to come to La Ronceraye for a part of the year, bringing Alice, 'who likes nothing so well as fowls, trees, and children,' said he.

The day fixed for the departure was near, and Mrs. de Flavier, who had been paying a number of farewell visits, and was very tired, was just going to lie down on the sofa, when she thought she heard children's voices in the dining-room ; so she went to see if there was any ground for her suspicions.

On opening the door, she saw Harry and Pauline trying to hide something under their pinafores. There was a chair at the sideboard ; the children had evidently been up on it to get something. This something proved to be a sugar-basin, full of lump sugar, which they had just placed on the table. Two tumblers

were plainly to be seen sticking out under Harry and Pauline's pinafores.

'What are you about there, children?'

'Nothing, mamma.'

'Why did you get down the sugar?'

'For nothing.'

'You do not mean to say you climbed up on a chair and took the sugar-basin down only for the pleasure of looking at it! What were you going to do with it?'

'Nothing at all,' the children answered one after the other, and looked down. Mrs. de Flavier continued more sternly:

'You know, children, that I rarely scold you for being giddy or careless; but if there is one thing your father and I detest more than another, it is untruthfulness. You have still got your glasses in your hands; you had taken some sugar, and there is water. I ask you again, for the last time, what were you doing?'

'We were mixing some water and sugar, mamma,' said the two children very low.

‘You shall not have any now, for trying to take it on the sly.’ And Mrs. de Flavier put the glasses back in their place, and the sugar-basin. ‘You are two greedy little children; but what I cannot forgive is your having told me a lie. Go to your rooms; I do not wish to see you!’

Harry and Pauline took each other’s hand, and left the dining-room. They went and sat on two little stools in the play-room. There they stayed, facing each other, but not looking at each other, only meditating on their naughtiness, with all the gravity Mrs. de Flavier could have wished.

‘God will be very displeased,’ said Pauline all at once.

‘What will He do to us?’ asked Harry.

‘I don’t know.’

And then there was a more profound silence than ever. The children did not play. They were thinking about the sugar, the water, and the glasses; they had a guilty

conscience, and as yet had found no means of calming it.

But after some time they rose, and taking each other's hand, went towards the drawing-room. In passing through the dining-room, Harry cast an angry look on the sugar-basin, and said :

‘It's all its fault that we have been naughty.’

‘And we have been very naughty,’ answered Pauline.

When they reached the drawing-room, which was only lighted by the fire, they settled themselves in the recess of the window, but here they felt as ill at ease as in their own room.

‘Suppose we say our prayers?’ said Harry suddenly.

‘Yes; we can ask God to forgive us.’

‘And then, perhaps, He will not be so angry.’

The room was dark and quiet; the children knelt down near the window. They

did not hear the door open and some one come in.

‘Pray, God, forgive us for having been so naughty,’ said Harry, and Pauline repeated the words after him. ‘We were each going to



take two lumps of sugar, and we have told a lie. Pray, God, forgive us for Jesus Christ's sake.'

The children rose, and the door closed noiselessly.

‘What crime have the children committed?’ asked Mr. de Flavier, entering his wife’s room. ‘I found Harry and Pauline kneeling in a corner of the drawing-room, asking God to forgive them for having taken two lumps of sugar.’

Mrs. de Flavier smiled.

‘I am not sorry that their fault has weighed so heavily on their conscience. One can never overlook a falsehood, be it great or small, and I should not like the children to think lightly of what they have done.’

The evening came, and with it the children’s bed-time. Mrs. de Flavier always undressed them herself, and tucked them up in their little white beds, after having helped them to say their prayers.

‘You forgive us, mamma?’ said Harry, pulling her dress to keep her by his bed.

‘Yes, darling, I forgive you, because I know you are very sorry for what you have done.’

‘Then it’s all right,’ said the little boy,

nestling into his pillow. 'God has forgiven us too, so every one has forgiven us, and I am going to sleep. Good-night.'

His mother smiled a little as she closed the curtains of the little bed. She took away the light, and five minutes later no sound was audible in the room but gentle, regular breathing, troubled evidently by no cares or remorse.





### CHAPTER III.

#### *FIRST EXPERIENCES.*

‘BUT where is our little brother?’ cried Elizabeth, the day after they had arrived at La Ronceraye. ‘Mamma told us we should find a little brother here.’

‘He is not come yet; he will come soon,’ answered Mr. de Flavier.

‘Mamma said we could ask all the flowers in the garden about him.’

‘But there are so many flowers in the



garden!’ And the little girls looked quite confused.

‘That is an indispensable condition, though,’ said Mr. de Flavie, laughing; ‘you must not forget one single flower, or else it will never forgive you.’

‘*All* the flowers!’ repeated Harry, crest-fallen. ‘All the flowers and all the buds! We must begin directly.’ The three children were rushing into the garden, when they heard Mrs. Aubry’s voice :

‘Come, my dears, and pay your poor old aunt a little visit before you fly away like birds. I have something to tell you.’

Elizabeth, Harry, and Pauline entered the drawing-room, and found Mrs. Aubry lying on the sofa. A violent attack of rheumatism had kept her prisoner for a fortnight, but her face lighted up and her voice grew cheerful as she heard the patter of little feet, and saw the rosy, bright faces, surrounded by hair all in confusion.

‘I cannot follow you in your walks because I have no legs, but I want’—

‘You have no legs!’ cried Pauline, wondering what the shawl spread out on the



sofa covered. ‘But you had legs last year!’

‘They will come back next week, goosey; those I have now are of no use to me. But all that has nothing to do with what I was

going to say. You will each follow your nose.'

'Our nose?'

'Hush! Your nose will lead you straight on, through a little path, till you come to the hen-house. There you will find fowls of all kinds, and you may each choose one, which I will give you.'

'We may have a chicken apiece? Oh! thank you, Auntie; how kind of you! How delightful!'

Mrs. Aubry put her hands to her ears. 'Run away, run away, you noisy little things; you quite deafen me!'

The children did not require telling twice, but disappeared screaming for joy. They bounded into the garden and from thence to the fowl-house, and were not long getting there. They were astonished at all they saw. There were white hens and black hens; cocks, with changeful green plumage, strutting about majestically; pigeons of all shades of colours making



‘Nasty, naughty fowl!’—P. 55.



love to their companions, who only turned away disdainfully ; guinea-fowls, turkeys, etc.

‘I should like that fine black and green fowl,’ cried Harry. ‘Let’s go in and see.’

The fowl was a cock, with rather a bad temper. No sooner were the children within reach of him, than he rushed at them, and forced them to beat a retreat.

‘Nasty, naughty fowl!’ cried Harry, hoping to frighten him away. ‘Elephant! rhinoceros! toad!’ The cock, indignant at these invectives, which he doubtless found inapplicable, ruffled up his feathers, and darted at the three children again. They, finding things getting serious, and that they were at a disadvantage, took to flight, and disappeared ignominiously through the little door by which they had entered, and which they had fortunately left open.

‘What an ill-mannered beast!’ cried Pauline as soon as they were in safety.

‘I shan’t choose *him* now,’ answered Harry,

still feeling the effects of the battle. 'He's a naughty cock.'

'Let's go and ask the poultry-maid to help us choose,' said Elizabeth; 'I want my fowl.' The second visit was more successful than the first. Rose showed the children the sitting hens, the eggs, and the chickens, and also helped them to make their choice.

'One can see you had Rose to help you,' said Mrs. Aubry when they returned; 'she has given you such good advice that you have taken some of the best fowls in the poultry-yard. But no matter; I told you to choose, and I keep my word.'

From that time the fowls occupied the children greatly. They must be fed, they must have pink ribbons round their necks, they must be taken for walks in the garden. They were a great amusement to the little folks.

Mrs. Aubry got quite well again, and was able to take the children for long walks in the woods, fields, and pasture-lands. One day, as

they were coming back, she noticed that Pauline was very quiet, and said :

‘What is the matter, Pauline? You are not generally so very silent, but to-day you haven’t spoken a word.’



‘Feeding the fowls.’

‘I was thinking about something, Auntie.’

‘What was it, dear?’

‘Something I don’t understand, which I want to ask mamma.’



Mrs. Aubry asked no further questions, and they came home quietly. Directly she got in, Pauline went up to her mother's room. Mrs. de Flavier was alone, very busy sorting some baby-clothes.

‘Are they for the little brother, mamma?’

‘Yes, for the little brother or sister. I have promised you one or the other, but I do not yet know whether it will be a Catherine or a William.’ And Mrs. de Flavier went on with her occupation, whilst Pauline, her elbows on the table and her head in her hands, seemed engaged in deep thought.

‘What are you thinking about, darling?’ said her mother at last.

‘I am thinking about our Lord Jesus Christ, Whom I have seen to-day,—and I don’t understand.’

‘What don’t you understand?’

‘You told me that the Lord Jesus was dead, and that He was in heaven. He can’t be in heaven, for I have seen Him!’

‘What do you mean, my child? You don’t know what you are talking of!’

‘I *have* seen our Lord nailed to a cross, just as you have told me He was, and just as He is in the picture in my Bible history. You told me He was in heaven, and He is not!’

‘Where did you see that?’

‘At a place we went to with Aunt Aubry. There was a large cross, and on it there was our Lord crowned with thorns. You told me He was in heaven.’

Mrs. de Flavier at last understood her little girl’s difficulty. ‘It was a crucifix you saw, darling,’ she said, taking her on her lap. ‘It is an image of our Lord, but not Himself.’

‘It was Himself; I saw Him! How can He be there and in heaven too?’

Mrs. de Flavier got up, and fetched a photographic album. ‘Who is that?’ she said, opening the book.

‘Papa.’

‘Well, you see it is a likeness of papa, but not himself, as you know very well.’

Pauline reflected deeply. Her two little hands were folded on her knees, her eyes were trying to read those of her mother.

‘Here is Aunt Alice’s photograph too, but you know it is not herself. You can see the image of the Lord on the cross, but the Lord Himself is in heaven.’

‘Yes, yes; I understand.’ And Pauline, kissing her mother, slipped gently down.

‘The reality is in heaven,’ murmured the child, and, still thinking, went away to rejoin her brother and sister.

‘One never knows what passes in children’s minds,’ said Mrs. de Flavier to herself as she returned to her work, ‘and how soon they begin to puzzle themselves with all sorts of problems. God grant that their mother may always be able to set them right, as in this case!’

Days and weeks went on; the spring was

well set in; and Mr. and Mrs. Bernard de Flavier were expected soon.

‘I am not very comfortable about Alice’s health; she seems to me in a very low way,’ said Mrs. de Flavier to her husband. ‘The country air will do her good; she requires it.’

‘You must remember, dear, that Alice had never lived in a town till she came to us. The change has not been beneficial to her.’

‘Will the little brother or sister be here when Aunt Alice comes?’ asked Elizabeth.

‘Yes, yes, darling; he will very soon come now.’

‘Soon? Oh, how nice! we have been waiting for him so long.’

Two days later, Mr. de Flavier came into the little girls’ room at seven o’clock in the morning.

‘As soon as you two and Harry are dressed, you may come on tiptoe into the pink room, and I will show you something.’

‘The pink room is the little brother’s room!’ cried Elizabeth.

‘Oh, papa, is he come?’

‘You will see when you are ready. Don’t be so inquisitive.’

The two little girls sprang out of bed, and began putting on their stockings.

‘Harry! Harry!’ they called through the half-open door, ‘we are sure the little brother has come! Make haste and dress!’

‘Coming, coming!’ answered Harry. ‘No, nurse, I won’t put on a clean shirt; I want to go and see our little brother.’

‘Harry,’ said the little girls again, ‘will he be pretty, do you think?’

‘I really don’t know. Nurse, I won’t wash myself; I am in such a hurry!’

‘Oh yes, Master Harry, you shall wash, if you stay here till to-morrow.’

This threat sounded to Harry so terrible that he allowed himself to be dressed without further trouble. He went into his sisters’

room just as their nurse had finished with them.

‘We are ready, we are ready. Nurse, how long you are!’ And the three children ran to the door, and arrived on tiptoe at the pink room, whispering on their way, and flattering themselves that they made no noise.

‘Oh, papa! where is our little brother?’ they asked as they entered.

Mr. de Flavier led the way to a cradle adorned with blue bows, where lay a little red baby, with great black eyes.

‘What an ugly little thing!’ cried Harry, with characteristic frankness; ‘he is all red!’

Elizabeth and Pauline made no remark; they contemplated the new-comer silently, and kept their impressions to themselves.

‘You were still redder when you were born,’ said Mr. de Flavier. ‘But never mind; come and see if you like the other better.’

The children’s eyes grew round with as-

tonishment; and their father took them to another cradle, prepared hastily, but containing a second little creature, quite as wide-awake, but not nearly so red as the first.

‘Why, there are two!’ cried Elizabeth.

‘More, more, papa!’ cried Pauline, almost beside herself.

‘My dear children, you are insatiable. I give you a brother and a sister, when I had only promised you one or the other, and still you are not content?’

‘Oh yes, we are, papa! They are come at last! What will their names be?’

‘William and Catherine. But don’t make such a noise; your mamma is ill.’

‘Ill? just when William and Catherine have come! What a pity!’

‘I hope she will get well soon; but just at present you must not make any noise in the house, for she is very tired.’

‘How long will it be before our little brother and sister can run about in the garden?’

‘Oh, not for a long time to come! You may give your mother a kiss, and then run away without making any noise. Aunt Alice will be here in a day or two.’

‘Aunt Alice too! and William! and Catherine! How many good things at once! how nice!’

They entered their mother’s room quietly. The shutters were half closed. Mrs. Aubry drew back the bed-curtains gently, so that the children might come nearer.

‘Mamma, do you know that William and Catherine are come?’ asked Elizabeth, finding it very difficult to speak softly.

‘Yes, darling, I know.’

‘But, mamma, you don’t know what black eyes they both have.’

‘Silence, children, you tire your mother,’ said Mr. de Flavie, coming forward. ‘Go into the garden; that is the only place where you can make a noise without being heard.’

‘Mamma is very tired,’ said Elizabeth as



she left the room; 'she didn't even kiss us.'

'But Aunt Alice is coming soon, and she will take such good care of mamma that she will get well directly.'

'Let's do something for Aunt Alice. We must give her something when she arrives. I have tenpence.'

'And I have one and threepence.'

'I have only fivepence,' said Pauline, rather sorrowfully. 'I had a little more, but I have lost it.'

'Never mind, never mind,' cried Harry. 'We have—let's see—tenpence, and fifteenpence, and fivepence; that makes half-a-crown. We shall be able to buy something very nice with that.'

'Are there any rose trees at the market?'

'Very likely there are. Let's ask the gardener to buy us a nice rose tree.'

The gardener laughed, and undertook the commission.

‘You ought to have a very nice rose tree for half-a-crown, young ladies,’ said he.

Two or three days passed; the rose tree was bought; everything was in attendance on Aunt Alice.

‘The carriage is a long while coming,’ said Harry. ‘They will never arrive.’

‘Here they are! here they are! they are in the avenue!’

A moment later, and the children were kissing their aunt. Mrs. Aubry and Mr. de Flavier were on the steps; everybody was laughing and talking, and Harry could hardly restrain his cries of joy. Uncle Bernard had already gone into the house with a large bundle of wraps.

‘You will please to take care, sir, or you will break the fine rose tree the young ladies and Master Harry have bought for their aunt.’

‘For their aunt? Come, I will tease them

a little ; they have quite got out of the habit of it.'

'Come, dears, you have kissed your aunt quite enough. Now come and see what a pleasant surprise I have prepared for her.'

The children came at once, and their uncle, followed by Mrs. Bernard de Flavier, took them up to a corner of the hall, where stood the famous rose tree. It was covered with flowers and buds of a creamy white, with a most delicious smell.

'Come and look at this rose tree, Alice ; it is for you. Isn't it a beauty ?'

'What splendid flowers ! I never saw anything so perfect ! And what a lovely colour !'

'Come, children, admire ! What do you think of it ?'

'It is very pretty,' answered Elizabeth, looking at her brother and sister, who said nothing.

What did it all mean ? How *could* the rose tree belong to Uncle Bernard ? And if it

didn't belong to him, what right had he to take it and give it to Aunt Alice? And she believed what he said!

'I never saw children so quiet! What! don't you like my rose tree?'

'It is very beautiful,' said Pauline at last, with a great effort.

Aunt Alice began to suspect a mystery, the children looked so confused and surprised, and Mr. Bernard de Flavier stood looking very mischievous and amused.

'Bernard, is this rose tree really from *you*?'

'Yes, really. Now, do you like it?'

'He didn't pay for it!' cried Harry, now no longer able to restrain his indignation. 'It was half-a-crown,—all the money we had,—and we bought it for you, Aunt Alice!'

Their young aunt gathered the children to her, while Mr. Bernard made his escape, pretending to be very frightened.

'Poor little things! And so you have spent all your money to buy me this lovely

rose tree! How kind of you! and how glad I am to see you again!’

‘And William and Catherine are so pretty!’

‘All the same, *he* didn’t pay for it,’ muttered Harry. ‘It’s too bad to have given us such a fright.’





## CHAPTER IV.

### *HIDDEN TREASURES AND FUNERALS.*

DAYS and months went by, and the children's love for the country increased more and more. William and Catherine began to toddle about, and still Aunt Alice was at La Ronce-raye. Uncle Bernard did not seem to wish to return to Paris ; he found occupation about the farm, and took long walks with his brother in the fields and woods, marking the trees that had to be cut down, and tracing out new paths. When he came back, he went and sat by his wife's sofa, and dinner would often

be announced several times before Mr. and Mrs. Bernard de Flavier would consent to break off their conversation and betake themselves to the dining-room. Mrs. Bernard (as the villagers called her) was quite in her element in the country.

As for Elizabeth, Harry, and Pauline, every day seemed more delightful to them than the preceding one; great discoveries were made in the fields and woods, the best nooks for violets and primroses found out, as well as for periwinkles and cowslips.

With all their games and little naughtinesses, the children were always greatly preoccupied by the welfare of their parents, and they often had consultations as to how they could help them. It never entered their heads to take more care of their frocks and pinafores, or to be more attentive to their lessons; oh, no! that would have been too insignificant, too commonplace for *them*; their plans were on a far higher scale.

Sometimes they thought of making a new path through the woods, sometimes their idea was to save up their pocket-money to buy a horse, which Mr. de Flavier and Uncle Bernard might ride by turns. Then all was changed again, and it was settled they should build a summer-house, in which Mrs. de Flavier and Aunt Alice should come and sit to work, write, or rest. Elizabeth, Harry, and Pauline had been several days at work, but in spite of all their efforts the summer-house did not make much progress. They had stuck in a few sticks, propped up with stones, to make the walls. The edifice was in a shrubbery, and Elizabeth might be seen arriving on the scene of action with red cheeks, hat hanging by its strings from her shoulders, and brown holland pinafore filled with large stones. Harry carried a large can of water to make some cement out of sand. This was quite forbidden, the children knew it well.

‘ But “ the parents ” will be so glad to have



a summer-house!' they said, and went on with their labours with more zest than ever.

At last one fine day they began to get a little tired of the summer-house.

'Suppose we do something else!' said Elizabeth.

'Let's hunt for the treasure!' exclaimed Pauline.

'Papa says there is no treasure,' replied Harry in a melancholy voice.

A large stone had hit him on the leg, and the crushed seeds of fuchsia, which Elizabeth and Pauline had applied to the wound as an infallible remedy, had only served to inflame the skin; so Elizabeth had been obliged to remove the plaster, and Harry was rather sad after so many misfortunes.

'How pleased "the parents" would be if we found the treasure!' repeated Pauline. 'I heard mamma tell papa yesterday that she should not buy a new silk dress, because it was too dear.'

‘They say they are not rich,’ added Elizabeth, ‘and yet mamma gave me a good many sixpences yesterday to give to the poor. If I had all the sixpences she gives away, I should soon be rich. Pauline, how much do you think papa and mamma have a year?’

‘Perhaps two hundred shillings each, as they say they are not rich,’ said Harry thoughtfully.

‘Well, then,’ said Pauline, ‘if we found the treasure, that would certainly give them a hundred shillings more. Old Antoine says there is a treasure hid somewhere, he is quite sure of it.’

‘Old Antoine must know, if he says so,’ added Elizabeth.

So, without further deliberation, the children directed their steps to a corner of the garden where they had already begun to rout, and where they were in the habit of spending their time digging, whenever their other plans failed.

The summer-house was altogether forsaken, and for several days Elizabeth, Harry, and

Pauline, armed with their spades, worked assiduously at their treasure. They had succeeded in disclosing to view an enormous stone, at the bottom of a deepish hole, and now they were wondering how they could raise it; for they had made up their minds, that if the treasure were in the garden at all, that was the place. But in vain did they pull, tug, and shake the stone; it would not stir. The children were quite exhausted, so much so, that one day, when they saw Mr. de Flavier and his brother passing, they called them to their aid.

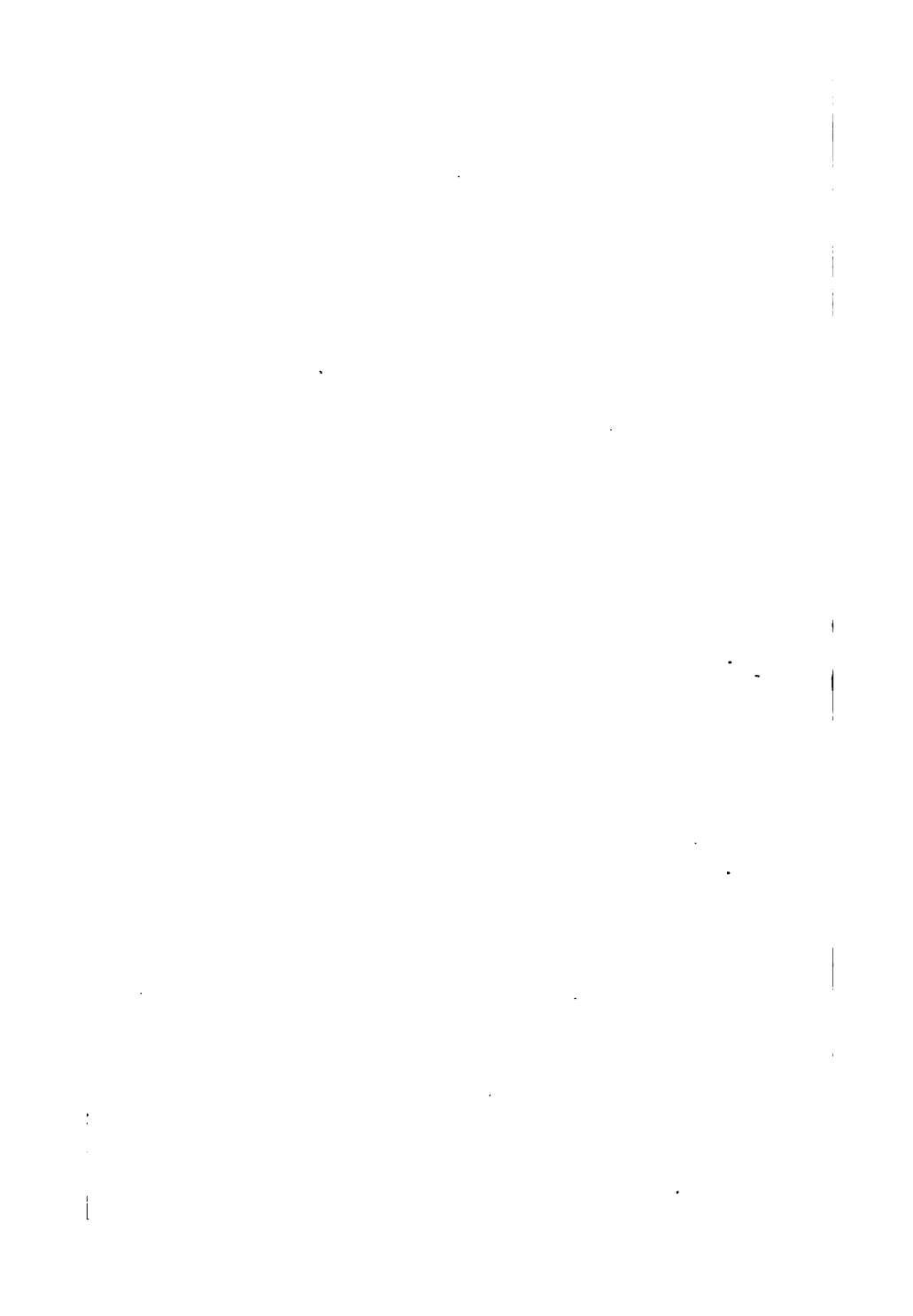
‘Well, have you found nothing yet?’ said Uncle Bernard.

‘No, but perhaps under the stone’—

Harry looked knowingly at Elizabeth, who was silent; the secret must not be quite let out. Mr. de Flavier stepped forward, and drawing his hand out of his pocket, he passed it rapidly under the stone. Then taking it away, he said :



‘ Well, have you found nothing yet ? ’ — P. 76.



‘I have sounded the earth, and I should not be surprised if we were to find something, after all.’

‘Do you think so?’

And the children’s eyes sparkled, they clapped their hands, and set to work on the stone with greater ardour than ever. Their father stopped them.

‘Stay, stay, you cannot lift such a weight.’

And with a single effort, Mr. de Flavier raised the last obstacle. The stone rolled on the grass. No sooner was it out of the way than the children got down into the hole, to the great detriment of their shoes and stockings.

‘Look! look!’ cried Elizabeth triumphantly, brandishing a piece of money covered with dirt. It was a halfpenny, the beginning of the treasure. Harry and Pauline were still hunting, but as yet they had found nothing. The poor little things were breathless; in their excitement they trod upon each other’s hands, but did not mind that; Elizabeth had

found the treasure, and they had discovered nothing, though they had worked just as much! Tears filled their eyes.

‘Look well, my dears; there are more still,’ said Mr. de Flavier, laughing.

Elizabeth had got out of the hole, and was examining her halfpenny in silence.

‘How do you know there are more?’ she said at last. Just then Harry and Pauline gave a little scream of joy. They had found several halfpence, and breathless with joy, they turned to their father and uncle, who stood near them smiling.

‘Is it?’—said Harry.

‘It was they who put the halfpence there!’ cried Pauline.

‘I thought so,’ added Elizabeth, crestfallen.

The two gentlemen began to laugh.

‘Well, you are not much to be pitied; you have found a treasure, and if you look well, you will find some more halfpence in the ground.’

‘Thank you,’ answered Elizabeth, the only one who remembered to show any gratitude.

Harry and Pauline were thunderstruck. Mr. de Flavier and Uncle Bernard had left them; the children went on looking for the rest of the halfpence,—there were fifteen in all, five for each one,—and then they went away rather disgusted at the result of their search.

‘I will never look for the treasure again!’ cried Pauline.

‘No more will I,’ said Harry; ‘it is too much trouble.’

‘And our spades are broken,’ added Elizabeth.

Just then they were called to lessons; the writing-master had arrived, and all plans and disappointments had to be put aside for the present. I do not know whether the lesson suffered from the misfortunes of the children; perhaps so, but the time for great pieces of naughtiness had not yet come. The children were young, and their mother sat in the room



with them, so the master had not much cause for complaint.

Some weeks after the discovery of the treasure, Elizabeth was sitting in her mother's room, making a frock for her doll, when she heard a sobbing in the passage. She ran to the door, and saw Pauline coming along crying.

'Have you fallen down, and are you hurt?' she asked.

'No! no! it's much worse than that!' sobbed Pauline.

'Have you been naughty, and got a scolding from mamma?'

'Oh no! much worse!'

'What is it, then?'

'Mrs. Titi is dead!' cried Pauline, throwing herself on the ground.

'Our dear Mrs. Titi is dead?' and without further questions, Elizabeth fell down beside her sister, and sobbed bitterly.

Mrs. Titi was the wife of a canary to whom

the children had given the name of Mr. Titi. The cage hung in Pauline's room, and every day they brought the birds some groundsel. Mr. Titi had died about two months before, and now Pauline announced the death of his widow.

The two little girls had sat sobbing in the passage for some time, when Harry arrived. They told him the sad news, which he was sorry to hear ; but he did not care for animals so much as his sisters did, and then Mrs. Titi had not lived in his room. All at once, up jumped Elizabeth.

'Suppose you were mistaken, Pauline ? Perhaps Mrs. Titi is not dead, after all.'

Pauline rose slowly ; she had no hope.

'Nurse said she was, and besides I saw her. She was lying on her back at the bottom of the cage, and she never lies on her back.'

The two little sisters began to cry again ; and tearfully they went into their room with Harry, to fetch the body of Mrs. Titi. Nurse

tried to console them, but in vain; when at last they left off crying, they were quite tired out.

Harry stood thinking.

‘We must bury her,’ he said at last.

‘No! no! I won’t have my little bird buried,’ said Pauline in a tearful voice.

‘I thought you would rather have it buried than thrown on the dust-heap.’

‘Thrown on the dust-heap!’ said the little girl, starting up. ‘I should like to see any one dare to think of doing so!’

Harry was silent, and said no more about funerals till the middle of the day, when the little girls at last consented to let their dear little bird be buried. It was Thursday, and a half-holiday; the prospect of the ceremony had rather soothed the children’s grief.

‘We must dig a hole first,’ said Harry, who was on in front with a spade. ‘Where shall we put her.’

'In our garden,' said William, trying to keep up with his sisters. Catherine was taking hold of his hand.

Elizabeth and Pauline held the four corners of a little white pocket-handkerchief, on which rested the body of Mrs. Titi. When the spot was fixed on, Harry began to dig, and had soon made a good-sized hole; he was for burying the bird at once.

'No,' said Elizabeth; 'we must put some rose leaves at the bottom, it would be much too hard for Mrs. Titi so.'

'But she can't feel if she's dead,' persisted Harry.

'I don't know about that; but she can't lie on the hard ground with only a handkerchief.'

William and Catherine brought some handfuls of grass, some rose leaves were scattered on the top, and the preparations were complete.

'Mrs. Titi's mother doesn't know she's dead,' said Pauline.

'No; how sad! I wish we could tell her

she's here. But we don't know her mother, nor where she lives.'

'No, we don't.' With that the children gently laid the little bird down on the rose leaves, the handkerchief over her. Then some more rose petals were scattered over the little body, and Harry began filling in the grave.

When this was done, he exclaimed :

'Now we must make a funeral oration ; Uncle Bernard said so. Will you speak, Pauline ?'

'No ; you make a speech for us all, that will do just as well.'

'Ladies and gentlemen'—

'There are no ladies,' objected Pauline ;  
'we are girls.'

'That doesn't matter, people always begin so !—Ladies and gentlemen, we have just buried a little bird'—

'We know that very well !' cried Elizabeth.

'Silence !—This little bird was charming ;

its name was Mrs. Titi. It had very good health in general. Only, one day, Mr. Harry de Flavier was cross with his little sisters, so he gave Mrs. Titi a bath. He plunged her into a basin of water, and when he let her go, she did not move. They put her into the window, in the sun, and she began to move and to ask for food. Ever since then she has been quite well until this morning. There!'

'Why do you say "There"?''

'"There" means "That's all." People always end their speeches so.'

'What a funny way!' said Elizabeth. 'It seems as if one were going on when one says "There!"'

'Now let us sing,' said Harry. And the children began to walk round the little grave one by one, holding each other's frock. This funeral march was accompanied by a lugubrious sort of chant without words, in which inspiration took the place of harmony. When

the children had walked round the grave twelve or fifteen times, they returned solemnly to the house ; the ceremony was ended.

One thing still remained to be done. Mrs. Titi's epitaph had to be engraved on a stone, and Harry went to look for a white one for the purpose. A consultation was held in the schoolroom, and the question, 'What shall we put on the stone ?' was raised.

'First of all, we must put "Here lies,"' said Harry.

'Well, we must put "Here lies Mrs. Titi,"' answered Elizabeth.

'That is not grand enough,' cried Harry.

'Here lies a itter bird,' said Catherine.

'That's too long,' said Harry.

'Oh, how troublesome you are with your "too long," and your "not grand enough"! You must write : "Here lies Mrs. Titi, a very good little bird."''

'Dood itter bird,' repeated William.

Harry seized a pen and began to write.

But he was not a very skilful penman as yet, and the pen did nothing but splutter and splash. Harry was quite warm with his exertions.

'Let's go and ask Aunt Alice,' he said at last.



This proposition was agreed to, and Mrs. Bernard de Flavie soon after heard a knock at her door. She immediately complied with the children's request, and set to work. In their zeal, Elizabeth and Pauline pushed her



elbow, Harry got on the back of her chair, and William and Catherine pulled her dress.

‘I am doing something much better than that,’ said Mr. Bernard de Flavie, seated at a table at the other end of the room. ‘Aunt Alice will not succeed in excelling me.’

‘What are you doing there? What are you writing?’ And the five children rushed up to their uncle, who had risen, and was holding a small piece of paper above his head.

‘Oh, do let us see!’

‘This is the object in question; we shall see if you will understand it.’

The drawing represented two birds sitting face to face, and wiping their eyes with a little white pocket-handkerchief.

‘That is not Mrs. Titi, for there are two!’

‘No; they are Mrs. Titi’s father and mother bewailing the loss of their daughter. I advise you to keep this in memory of them.’

'We don't know them; but that doesn't matter, as we were so fond of Mrs. Titi.'

Aunt Alice had finished her work; the epitaph was written in large characters on the white stone, and the children triumphantly carried it off, and placed it solemnly over Mrs. Titi's grave. When the evening came, all the children were very tired. Elizabeth and Pauline's eyes were still red, but the funeral ceremony had softened their grief considerably. They still felt Mrs. Titi's death, but, after all, they had had a good deal of fun.





## CHAPTER V.

### *THE CAT, THE GOAT, AND THE CABBAGES.*

WINTER had come, the trees had lost their leaves, and the children could not stay out in the garden all day at play.

But there was a new interest to keep them in-doors. This was an addition to the flock in the shape of a baby. Elizabeth and Pauline spent a good deal of time in its room, airing its clothes, helping the nurse to dress it, and sometimes even being allowed to wash its hands or feet. Harry often

followed his sisters into the room, and stood looking with awe at the small, fragile thing, who would one day be able, they told him, to run about in the garden with the others.



‘It is very kind of Aunt Alice to let us nurse the baby so much. Yesterday I was sitting on the sofa, and she allowed me to have Gaston on my lap for a little while.’

‘Did she? Then I shall ask her to let me have him too!’

‘Oh, but *you* are a boy!’

‘What does that matter? Uncle Bernard told me the other day that I held Gaston’s head very well.’

‘They are not going back to Paris.’

This was true. Mr. and Mrs. Bernard de Flavier had grown so fond of country life, that they decided to take up their abode at La Ronceraye with Mr. and Mrs. de Flavier. The two brothers had always been the best of friends; and from the day of Miss Dareste’s first arrival, Mrs. de Flavier had felt that she had found a sister in the gentle, affectionate girl.

William and Catherine were getting quite big; they could run about everywhere, and their tongues ran all day. The three *elder ones*, as they were called, began to fancy that they had spent their whole life amidst flowers and fields.

One day, when Pauline and Elizabeth were walking in the garden, gravely discussing the misdeeds of their dolls, they heard, not far off, a noise which attracted their attention; and looking about everywhere, they came at last



upon a little ball of grey fur at the foot of a tree. It gazed at them with large blue eyes, and mewed piteously.

It is needless to say that Pauline and Elizabeth immediately tried to capture it; but when the kitten saw their intentions, it ran in among

the bushes. It was useless to try and stop it, it only ran the faster, and took refuge finally among some French beans in the kitchen garden.

‘Suppose we go and call the gardener?’



said Elizabeth; ‘perhaps he will be able to catch it, it is so pretty!’

‘Yes, that’s a good idea,’ answered Pauline; ‘run and fetch Louis, and I will stay here and mind the kitten.’

To while away the time of Elizabeth's absence, Pauline gathered a sorrel leaf and began munching it. This was a forbidden pleasure, but one would be so perfect if one were never disobedient !

Elizabeth came running back, followed by Louis, who was very glad to help the children, for fear they should tread on his French beans. The pursuit was not long ; the gardener had long legs and a hat, which latter he threw over the fugitive. The hat jerked convulsively, but kitty was safely under it, and Louis took hold of it carefully and placed it in Pauline's pinafore. Precaution was necessary, for the captive wriggled about like a snake, and tried in every way to escape ; it did not mew now, but was evidently in a great state of agitation, for it went on struggling all the while Pauline was carrying it into the house. She did not much relish this operation, for the kitten might at any moment escape and dart into her face ; but since they had



lived in the country, the children had got more used to animals, and possessed a fair amount of courage. They therefore started off at a run, thinking the sooner they reached the house the better.

‘Where shall we put it?’ asked Pauline, out of breath. ‘We must have a basket, but first of all we had better go and ask mamma if we may keep it;’ and in a moment the children were up in their mother’s room.

‘Oh, please, mamma, do let us keep it!’ they cried out both at once.

‘Keep what, children?’ Mrs. de Flavie was writing letters, and did not see Pauline’s pinafore.

‘A lovely little kitten, mamma; *do* let us keep it! It will be so useful to catch mice, when it gets bigger; and then we have no Mrs. Titi now.’

Elizabeth and Pauline were so earnest in their entreaties, that their mother at last granted their request, on condition that the

cat did not prevent them doing their lessons well. They were delighted, and carried off their pet to put it into a basket and give it something to eat.

All the rest of the day they had no trouble with it; when it had had its milk, the kitten made no further attempt to escape, and even seemed inclined to play with the children.

In the evening the children put it back into its basket, covered over with a doll's quilt; and having wished it good-night, they went to sleep themselves in their little white beds.

It was perhaps one o'clock in the morning when Pauline awoke with a start at the sound of mewing. She was frightened at first, for she had forgotten the kitten; but all at once she remembered the basket at the foot of her bed, and listened for the mewing to begin again.

She had not to wait long, the mewing was repeated; and sitting up in bed, she tried to quiet the kitten by speaking gently to it.

'Hush, kitty, you must go to sleep now.'

‘Mew!’

‘Hush, hush, kitty! Elizabeth, our kitten is crying!’

But Elizabeth did not answer; her calm, regular breathing announced her sound sleep.

Soon the kitten began to mew again, and Pauline was dreadfully afraid that the sound would awake her nurse; she herself was very sleepy, she rubbed her eyes, and would much have liked to go to sleep again.

‘Elizabeth! do you hear? Elizabeth!’

No answer. It was pitch dark, and the kitten would not leave off mewling. At last, not knowing what else to do, Pauline got up, and groping towards the basket, she began talking to the kitten without lifting the lid.

‘Hush, darling, go to sleep; this is not the time to be walking about.’ But, far from quieting the inhabitant of the basket, Pauline’s voice did but excite it to mew still louder. The child raised the lid and began to stroke the kitten, which left off mewling, but directly

she ceased her caresses it began to cry again. Pauline was in despair. She was cold and sleepy, and very much wished to be in bed ; but it was not to be thought of, her *protégé* would soon have awakened all the household. At last she bethought herself of a little milk which was left in a saucer. She had some trouble in finding it, and began by spilling half of it on her night-gown. The kitten eagerly lapped the rest, Pauline holding it all the time for fear of its escaping ; she then shut it up in its basket again.

‘Now I hope you will let me go to sleep,’ she whispered. ‘If you were as sleepy as I am, you would not make such a noise.’

The kitten was quiet now, and Pauline crawled back to bed, pleased at her victory, and very glad to be snugly under her blankets once more. Young people soon go off to sleep, and the little girl did not awake till her room was full of sunshine.

The first thing she did was to tell Elizabeth,

who was rubbing her eyes, of the night's adventures, including the milk episode, and her care not to awake her nurse. But, unluckily, Pauline spoke too loud, and nurse, who was in the next room, heard more than it was intended she should.

It was Sunday, and the children were allowed on that day to stay in bed an extra half-hour. Whilst their nurse was at breakfast, Elizabeth and Pauline regularly indulged in a game of what they called 'frog.' Their parents would not have cared much about it, had they seen it. The two little beds were near enough to each other for Elizabeth and Pauline to jump from one to the other. They might have fallen between the two; nurse, also, had often told them their jumps would break the springs of the mattress; but as yet they had heard no crack, and the game of 'frog' was too delightful to be given up only because of a vain fear.

So Elizabeth and Pauline got on the beds,

and the game began. They both started at the same time, so as to pass each other in the air, taking great care not to come into collision, which would have been painful. Sometimes they took such a good start that they arrived on the further side of the bed, but they paid little heed to that. No sooner did they hear their nurse's step in the passage than they jumped into bed, and no one would have guessed with what zest they had been acting 'frog' a moment before.

Part of the day was taken up with discussions as to what the kitten's name should be; and at last, at the instigation of Mr. de Flavier, it was decided to call it 'Farfadet.' He told the children that in the south of France this name was given to the elves; and certainly it proved a very good name for Farfadet, for he got to be the merriest and most frolicsome of cats.

In the evening, nurse, without giving her reasons for such a step, shut up Farfadet in a

tiny kennel which had once belonged to a toy terrier; she bolted the little door, and for a time all was silent inside. But before very long, Farfadet, finding himself rather dull, began to scratch at the door, which was made of very fine wire. This was worse than the mewing, for the noise was incessant; and so, in the middle of the night, Pauline heard nurse get up in indignation and carry kennel and all out of the room. From that time Farfadet always slept alone, nurse telling Mrs. de Flavier that Miss Pauline had had two bad nights because of the cat, and that it would not do for her to go on so.

In the distant room to which Farfadet was now banished, he could do whatever he liked; and he took advantage of this permission, if one might judge from the wire door, which before long was sadly in want of repair.

If the children were forced to do without Farfadet's society at night, they made up for it in the day-time. Never was cat more

patient and more intelligent. It is true that his education had begun early; but if the education of all children succeeded as well as that of Farfadet, their parents would have little cause for complaint.



As soon as Elizabeth and Pauline were dressed, they used to perform Farfadet's toilet. Harry often came to help them; but as he was a little rough in his movements, Farfadet did not like him so much as the two



little girls. They put him into a little grey flannel dressing-gown which had belonged to one of their dolls ; when they had fastened it round the waist and down the front, they put the cat in an arm-chair belonging to their dolls, and drew him up to a doll's dressing-table. Then they washed his face and paws with a sponge and water, and perfumed him with a little eau-de-Cologne. Farfadet was never known to mew or to move ; the only part of his toilet which he disliked was the cap ; he always shook his ears till he got rid of it.

When the dressing process was over, Elizabeth and Pauline put Farfadet in his arm-chair before the fire and gave him his breakfast. After that they went to their lessons, and then he would stay in the same position for an hour or two. He was nice and warm, and went off to sleep.

When the children went out for a walk, they took Farfadet with them, then without his dressing-gown ; he followed them just like

a dog, but sometimes, if the walk was too long or he was tired, he would stand up on his hind legs and mew till Elizabeth or Pauline took him up in her arms. They never refused to do so, however much their jackets might suffer by it, for Farfadet was often very muddy.

This much-loved cat had one great fault, that of scratching. When he was in the children's lap, he would turn over on his back, and seizing their hand with his fore-paws, would kick out his hind ones very fast, so that the children's hands would have soon been covered with blood if they had let him go on. Sometimes Farfadet only scratched in play, but sometimes it was to revenge himself when the children had been teasing him very much by obliging him to *hunt*. To *hunt*, each child was provided with a little stick, with which they pursued Farfadet from chair to chair and from table to sofa, without giving him a moment's respite. After so much running about the cat was tired, and when tired he

was also cross ; then the children took good care to keep away from him, otherwise they would have been scratched mercilessly.

Farfadet had three regular meals a day, and of these luncheon was not the least important, for it was the most complicated. At three o'clock the cat was often in his dressing-gown, lying on his back in one of the doll's beds ; he had got into the way of it, and when in bed always lay on his back. Then he was made to sit up in bed ; a table was brought near, on which were placed a doll's plate, a biscuit, a little teaspoon, and a jug of milk.

Elizabeth broke up some biscuit, and poured the milk over it, the cat looking on with the greatest interest all the while, for he well knew what it all meant. When the sop was ready, the two little girls fed him with the spoon, after putting him on a table-napkin. This meal was repeated every day with success.

One Thursday, when the children could not

go out because it was wet and cold, Pauline said suddenly to Elizabeth :

‘Farfadet looks very poorly, I think.’

‘Do you ? Poor Farfadet ! what can be the matter with him ?’

‘Perhaps he has the stomach-ache.’

‘What can we do to make him better ?’

‘A poultice ! Let’s make a poultice of potato-flour. I’ve seen nurse do it ; it looks quite easy to do.’

Buoyed up with this false idea, and encouraged by Harry, the two children commenced preparations. Pauline put on some water to boil, while Elizabeth went to fetch some potato-flour and some old muslin.

‘I’m sure it will do him a great deal of good !’ repeated Pauline.

‘He sleeps very soundly, and doesn’t seem in much pain,’ said Elizabeth.

Pauline put two spoonfuls of flour into the basin, and Elizabeth gently poured the boiling water on it. Pauline had seen her nurse stir

it while pouring in the water, so she did the same.

‘It will get thick and transparent,’ said Elizabeth. ‘I know a potato - flour poultice should be transparent to be good.’ Elizabeth went on pouring, Pauline went on stirring, but no change took place ; the basin grew full, that was all.

‘How very odd that it doesn’t thicken, Pauline !’

‘Wait a little, it will be all right ; pour in the water more quickly.’

Elizabeth poured, but without success. The basin was full of a whitish watery substance ; but as for a poultice, there was none.

‘Then it’s a failure,’ cried Elizabeth ; ‘I can’t make it out. Perhaps we ought to have poured in the water quicker still. Let’s throw this away, and begin again.’

So the children began again, but with no better success.

‘I think it is spoilt again this time, Pauline !’

‘No, no; go on pouring, it can’t fail this time.’

In spite of Pauline’s indignation, the poultice did *not* succeed better this time than the other. She was in despair.

‘Elle avait oublié un point,  
C’était d’éclairer sa lanterne.’

Elizabeth and Pauline did not know that they ought to have mixed the flour with cold water; and as they remained in ignorance of this fact till the end of the day, it was not astonishing that their attempt failed.

Finally, by using about half a bag of flour, they succeeded in making a kind of plaster, which they laid, very hot, upon Farfadet’s stomach, to cure him of an imaginary illness.

The cat was lying on his back on the bed when Elizabeth applied the poultice. He gave a jump when he felt the heat, but soon grew calm again, and remained motionless for two whole hours with the plaster on his stomach. He was warm, he had had his luncheon, and did not want anything else; as for the little

sisters, they were delighted at the new pastime they had invented.

It would take too long to recount all Farfadet's ways and doings ; and besides, Farfadet was not the sole object of the children's affections ; Amalthée also played an important part in their lives.

Amalthée was a goat, given by Mr. and Mrs. Bernard de Flavier to the children for a New Year's present. She was white and small, for a big goat might have knocked down William and Catherine. They found the one they had quite enough for them, and even Harry and Elizabeth had a hard matter to hold Miss Amalthée in, when she had a mind to go in an opposite direction to the one they took. She was a very capricious animal, and one never knew beforehand what she might take it into her head to do. She had a way of shaking her head which showed very clearly that she had no intention of obeying.

For some time the children had been in the

habit of leading her about with a string ; and every time they came to a bramble they were obliged to stop, for Amalthée was dearly fond of blackberry leaves, and she did not mind what she did to obtain them. However good-natured the children might be, it happened sometimes that they objected to stop, and then the goat would get angry, and, standing on her hind legs, would butt at the children furiously—not very pleasant for the little girls' dresses and Harry's trousers. She had a fine pair of horns, so that this butting was no joke ; in a few days the walkers were covered with little blue and black marks, made by Amalthée's horns. The children did not appreciate this style of thing ; they tried in every possible manner to induce Amalthée to pass the brambles without stopping. Sometimes they began to run with her as soon as they came in sight of a dangerous spot ; sometimes they walked between her and the bush, so that she should not see it ; but



the goat had good eyes, and often spied out the object of her desires before Elizabeth or Pauline had seen it.

One day Harry was at home learning a neglected lesson, but Elizabeth and Pauline went to take the goat out for a walk in the garden. The wind was high, and the two children were at the other end of the park, when they were overtaken by a downpour of rain and hail. Elizabeth had fastened Amalthée's string round her own waist; but the goat was frightened by the sound of the hail upon the leaves, and set off galloping at a furious pace. For some time she ran in the direction of the house, and then all was well; but all of a sudden she took fright at a clap of thunder, and rushed along a rapid descent towards the road. Elizabeth made frantic efforts to restrain her, and called to Pauline as loud as she could.

'Come quickly, come and help me! she is dragging me along!'

Pauline was half hidden by a bush, and the rain and wind made such a noise that Elizabeth could with difficulty hear her answer.

‘I can’t come! the wind is turning the umbrella inside out; I am trying to shut it!’

‘Make haste!’ cried Elizabeth in despair; ‘I am on the ground, and Amalthée is butting me with her horns!’

‘Elizabeth, our umbrella has turned inside out, and it is half-broken; I cannot shut it!’

‘Well, leave it on the ground and come and help me. Amalthée is quite wild; she is tugging me along.’

Pauline reached her with great difficulty, on account of the rain and wind; the two little sisters were soaked to the skin. Their united efforts succeeded in quieting Amalthée, but now she was trembling all over, and would not move a step farther.

‘Go and fetch Louis,’ said Elizabeth. ‘I will stay here and hold her in the meanwhile.’

‘But can you keep her in? I don’t like leaving you alone here.’

‘It can’t be helped; Amalthée won’t come on, so there is nothing else to be done.’

Pauline made for the house as fast as her legs could carry her. Elizabeth held the goat fast by its horns. The thunder was less loud, and the hail had ceased, but it rained still. Pauline had flown along, and in a minute was back again accompanied by the gardener, who seized the goat’s string. After a slight resistance, Amalthée, feeling a strong hand, allowed herself to be led home. Elizabeth and Pauline were tired, and greatly pleased to find, on reaching their room, that their nurse had lighted a good fire and prepared some dry clothes for them.

After such an adventure, the children decided to let their goat rove where she pleased, and not to lead her with a string. Amalthée repaid this mark of confidence by following them about everywhere like a dog;



A walking Noah's ark.—P. 119.



and if she stopped to eat some blackberry leaves, she made up for lost time by galloping after the children. Farfadet often joined them; and though they had no special love for each other, the two favourites did not quarrel. Mr. de Flavier said the procession looked like a walking Noah's ark.

'A Noah's ark without any father and mother!' answered Harry; 'how amusing it would have been!'

Amalthée liked brambles, but her taste for young cabbage leaves was still stronger and more dangerous. The old leaves, which were rather tough, she disdained utterly; but she had a perfect mania for the others, and seized upon them with avidity. Sometimes the children would take her up to the cabbage-bed in the kitchen garden. Elizabeth would hold the goat by the collar, while Pauline gathered a provision of cabbage leaves.

One day, when it was cold and had been raining, the two little sisters asked leave to go out.

‘It is very muddy, my dears,’ replied Mrs. de Flavier.

‘Oh, do let us, mamma! we did not go out yesterday, and I am sure Amalthée must want some cabbage leaves dreadfully!’

‘And we will put on our *Barchalou* boots.’

‘What boots are those with such a formidable name?’ asked Mr. de Flavier, laughing.

‘Our strongest boots, papa,’ answered Elizabeth. ‘We have read a story about a man called Barchalou. He went through a great many adventures, and he had a pair of boots of which the book speaks very often. They were very good and strong, so we have called ours after them.’

‘Well, put on your *Barchalou* boots, and go out; but don’t stay long, for it is cold,’ said Mrs. de Flavier.

Elizabeth and Pauline were delighted. They fetched Amalthée, who began to bleat on hearing their voices. She had found confinement to the house as tedious as the children had,

and now the two little girls, followed by the goat, set off for the kitchen garden. The last few nights had been frosty and cold, and the outer leaves of the cabbages were black.

‘How ugly they are!’ cried Pauline. ‘They look as if they had on Greek caps!’

‘Let’s take off their ugly caps,’ answered Elizabeth. ‘These old black leaves must prevent them from growing.’

The children carefully removed all the frost-bitten leaves, thus exposing to light all the little tender green leaves inside, which they thought much prettier.

‘People have no invention,’ said Pauline. ‘Louis ought to have done what we have been doing.’

‘Really, it was not hard to invent,’ said Elizabeth.

‘It is a pity,’ continued Pauline, ‘that all the little inside leaves cannot have the air as well as the others; they would grow much faster, and Amalthée could have more to eat, and



one would not see where they had been taken from. I have an idea! Have you your knife with you?’

‘Yes,’ answered Elizabeth, who did not see what her sister was driving at.

‘So have I. We will make a crossway mark in each cabbage, and then the young leaves inside will be able to have some air. It won’t take long.’

So the children dug their knives into the cabbages with all their might, not leaving one for another till the victim bore two deep marks in the form of a cross. The leaves creaked under the knives; Amalthée looked on attentively, and seemed to understand what her mistresses were doing.

‘How is it nobody has ever thought of doing that?’ repeated Elizabeth. ‘We have made a grand discovery; and how glad papa and mamma will be to see their cabbages growing so nicely!’

If the children had thought less of humanity

in general and in particular, they would have avoided doing a great deal of mischief with the best intentions.

‘How thirsty the young leaves inside must be!’ said Pauline, energetically digging her knife into the heart of a cabbage. ‘They are never watered; not a drop of water can get to them; it is not fair. Now they will be able to drink as much as they like.’

The work was done, and Elizabeth and Pauline went away well pleased.

‘We have rendered a great service to our parents,’ said Elizabeth. ‘If it had not been for us, no one would ever have thought of splitting up the cabbages.’

The two sisters took good care not to tell any one what a benefit they had conferred on their parents; it was to be a surprise. After two days, they went to see how the cabbages were getting on.

There was something about their appearance which gave a little uneasiness to the

benefactresses of humanity. It seemed as if all the young leaves inside had grown very quickly, and the others were frozen.

‘Our cabbages don’t look very well,’ said Pauline.

‘Oh, that will be all right,’ replied Elizabeth, not wishing to seem uneasy; ‘I assure you that will be all right.’

Instead of being ‘all right,’ the cabbages grew worse; and three days later, the children were much surprised to see Mr. de Flavier come into the schoolroom in a great state of indignation, saying: ‘Have any of you children been at the cabbage-bed by chance?’

‘They are often at it,’ said Mrs. de Flavier. ‘They go to get cabbage leaves for their goat.’

‘But all the cabbages are quite spoiled. Louis has just been to tell me; he only found it out this morning, and he is in a fine rage about it. He says no one but the “young ladies” can have spoiled the bed in such a

way for their goat. What have you done to it, children ?'

'We only made two deep cuts in each cabbage. We thought you would be very pleased, and that the young leaves would grow better.'

'Young leaves, indeed ! They have grown, and then they have been frost-bitten. The rain has penetrated to the heart, the cabbages have rotted, and not a single one will be fit to eat !'

Elizabeth and Pauline were in consternation. They had fancied they were doing something so useful !

'But, papa, we thought'—

'Well, another time you will think nothing, but be kind enough to consult us before you carry out all the schemes that pass through your brain. Who ever heard of cutting a cross in cabbages ? One would think you were out of your minds !'

Elizabeth and Pauline said nothing. Mr.

de Flavier very rarely scolded, and when he did, all the children were confounded. The little girls humbly begged for forgiveness, but that did not restore the cabbages to life; and for the rest of the winter, the market had to furnish all the cabbages consumed at La Ronceraye. It is needless to add, that from that day forth Elizabeth and Pauline renounced the idea of rendering service to humanity by cutting crosses in cabbages.





## CHAPTER VI.

### *A BALL IN NIGHT-GOWNS.*

‘How tiresome it is always to be called the *little ones*!’

‘You are the little ones, and you cannot help yourselves,’ said Elizabeth carelessly.

‘Gaston is the little one, and William and I are the middle ones. Uncle Bernard said so.’

'We are the *elders*, and you are the *youngsters* ! And you will always be the *youngsters* !' cried Harry.

'No, not always,' replied William, who was nearly crying, and whose voice trembled a little. 'Not always ; it isn't fair.'

Elizabeth, Harry, and Pauline went away, leaving Catherine and William standing repeating, 'The elder ones are very, very naughty,' not seeing that they themselves were making use of the very term which had so offended them. In reality, William and Catherine cared very little about being called the *youngsters* ; it was only now and then it came into their heads to object.

After having invented a new and not very profitable amusement, which, as it afterwards brought them punishment, I need not relate here, the 'youngsters' went off in search of another occupation. This time, fortunately, they found one which was not forbidden. It consisted in building houses for their special

friends, the earthworms. All that was necessary for this interesting operation was to go to a damp part of the lawn, and taking hands, the little boy and girl soon reached the proper spot. One of their *friends* was coming out of the earth to meet them.

‘Look, how beautiful he is!’ said William admiringly, stooping so as to see the worm better.

Catherine, who did not relish the trouble of stooping when she was standing, any more than that of getting up when once seated, let herself down on the ground calmly. She was not very tall, but she made up for it by being quite round; and when she wanted to make William envious, she would display her little fat, mottled, plump white arms, beside which the little boy’s arms looked like two sticks.

‘You frightened him; he is going!’ cried William. ‘Come and see.’

But Catherine had no intention of being uselessly disturbed, so all she said was :



‘Catch him and put him in my pinafore.’

William obeyed, and a minute later came back, bringing with delight his *friend*, who wriggled about in his fingers. Having placed the worm in Catherine’s pinafore, William went in search of some more, while Catherine occupied herself in caressing her favourite, who vainly tried to regain the grass. William soon came back with another worm, this time smaller, which he placed by the side of the other.

‘Now, Catherine, we must build them a house, or they will escape.’

Catherine was quite willing, and as there was plenty of clay just there, the palace destined for the worms was soon constructed. It was formed of a little mound of earth, hollow inside, with a hole in the side through which the inhabitants could pass. First of all, the worms already found were deposited in their palace, then the children set off, hand in hand, to look for more, and when they returned, five

or six *friends* were to be seen twisting about in Catherine's brown holland pinafore. They in their turn were placed in their house, then the roofing was completed, and every outlet stopped up.

'They will not run away this time,' said William; 'we have not made them a door.'

'But suppose they are dull, William?'

'Oh! they will not be dull, they are twisting about nicely.'

Next day, much to the children's disappointment, all the worms were gone. Their palace-walls were full of holes, through which they had made their exit.

'We must begin all over again,' said Catherine, undaunted.

'No, not now,' said her companion; and off they went to the prohibited pleasure of the day before, which this time did not succeed so well as the first, for their nurse found them out and took them to their mother, who decided that they should, as a punishment,

only have one thing for their dessert at dinner (the children were allowed every evening to choose three things at dessert). William and Catherine began to cry. They were still in tears when they joined the three *elders* in the garden.

‘What are you crying for?’ asked Elizabeth sympathisingly, lowering her voice.

‘We have—only one thing—at our dessert,’ sobbed William.

‘What have you done?’ asked Harry, still in a low tone.

But the two children would not answer; they were too near the nurses for any secrets, so all moved out of hearing. When William and Catherine had explained matters, the others tried to console them.

‘Don’t cry any more, dears; we will each keep a part of our dessert, we will put it in our pockets, and you will have as much as if you had not been punished.’

‘And it will serve the parents right,’ added Harry.

‘Yes, that it will,’ answered Elizabeth and Pauline together.

The *little ones* cried no more.

No one has ever been able to discover what punishment the children hoped to inflict on their parents by voluntarily depriving themselves of a portion of their dessert to give it to those who had none, but this was the regular phrase; and every time the children could manage to alleviate the punishments given to any of them, they repeated: ‘It will serve the parents right, quite right.’

Elizabeth, Harry, and Pauline were growing big, their lessons were more considerable, and their play-time in the garden was less. They had lessons in grammar, history, and did long dictations.

‘And papa is so severe, that one cannot make any mistakes,’ said Elizabeth.

‘It is very nice to be as young as William

and Catherine—they scarcely do any lessons!’ added Pauline.

‘We used to be like that when we were at Paris.’

‘Ah, yes! but now we have to work, and this funeral oration of Bossuet’s is very hard to learn by heart.’

‘We are very lucky not to have to do lessons in the evening; some children have to work after late dinner.’

‘Oh, that would be too bad! In the evening we go into the garden. We will have a good game of ball after dinner, if you like.’

Whilst the three elder ones were playing at ball, William and Catherine stayed in the drawing-room. They both had colds, and were very sorry to hear they were not to go out. Catherine stood leaning against the window, her nose flattened against the pane, watching the game.

‘Come along, Catherine; don’t stay there

doing nothing. I have a secret to tell you.'

Evidently the communication pleased the little girl, for she smiled, and repeated the usual phrase :

'It will serve the parents right.'



Let not the reader suppose from this oft-repeated phrase, that the *elders* or *youngsters* considered themselves ill - used victims of

their parents, or that they did not love them. This would be a great mistake. The children were very happy, as they well knew; but it relieved their conscience to repeat this phrase, it seemed to diminish the guilt of their little plans of disobedience.

William and Catherine asked if they might go to bed, and having said good-night, they hurried off with suspicious rapidity. Their rooms were some way from each other, but their plan was well concerted, and as soon as the nurses had gone down to dinner, the patter of little bare feet might have been heard along the passage.

William was the first to arrive at the rendezvous. Catherine joined him there.

‘What fun we shall have!’ said the little boy.

They had each of them thrown a little cape over their night-gowns. Catherine was in too great a hurry to take off her night-cap, but made up for it by putting on

a pair of little red slippers. William's feet were bare.

'Let's go on the hill,' he said; 'the elder ones must be still near the house.'

So out sallied the two children by the servants' staircase. They were soon hidden among the bushes which bordered the garden walks. Catherine was soon forced to give William one of her slippers; the gravel walks hurt his feet.

'Hop, like I do, on one leg nearly all the time,' she said; 'we shall manage very well so.'

Hopping along beneath the beautiful evening sky, the children reached the grass, and set off running. The sun had just set. By degrees they got so excited by their wild race, that they threw off their capes, which made them too hot and impeded their progress. They forgot all about house, parents, nurses, and in their wild joy gave utterance to peals of laughter, which were repeated by



every echo. They had never enjoyed themselves so much. They had, in their games, got farther and farther from home, and were now nearly at the end of the park.

All this while the house was upside-down ; the two little beds had been found empty, and the clothes neatly arranged upon their chairs. The nurses repeated : ' They cannot be very far off, for they have nothing on but their night-gowns.' But in spite of the assertions of the nurses, Mrs. de Flavier and her sister-in-law were feeling very anxious, and went about everywhere seeking for and calling the truants.

' What a blessing it is, Gaston is too little to be able to open doors ! ' said Mrs. Bernard.

Catherine and William were too far off, and too engrossed by their games, to hear the calls. Happily, the two fathers were still out ; they were strolling along smoking. All at once one of them stopped short.

' Did not you see something white on

the hill?' he asked. 'Look! I see it again now.'

Just then, joyous peals of laughter resounded through the calm evening air, and the two children, hand in hand, passed across a strip of moonlight on the grass.

'Let's go and see what it is! The children are all in-doors, are they not?'

'Of course; they all go to bed at half-past eight. The younger ones did not even go out.'

Mr. de Flavier and his brother went their way, and had soon ascended the green steep at the end of the park.

William and Catherine did not see their approach, they were still racing about on the grass; but the dew was beginning to fall, the little feet were wet, and the children were beginning to feel cold in their night-gowns.

All at once a cry was heard; the little girl felt herself raised from the ground. The father and uncle both cried at once:

‘Catherine! William! what *are* you doing here?’

A minute more, and the children were wrapped up in great-coats, and the two gentlemen set off running.



They said nothing, they did not scold the children; but their silence was much more terrible than their remonstrances would have been.

‘We will never do it again,’ said one little

voice at last, silence having become unbearable to its owner.

‘I should think you would not do it again, indeed! The whole house must be topsyturvy! And what a fright your mother must be in!’

At this indignant response, the little head, which had appeared for a moment, popped down again under the great-coat, and louder sobs than before emerged from under the other great-coat.

The house was reached. Everywhere cries were heard of, ‘William! Catherine! where are you?’

‘Here they are! We have found them!’ replied Mr. de Flavier and his brother.

Mrs. de Flavier was at the hall door; she seized one of the bundles, and Aunt Alice the other.

‘Ah, children!’ they cried, and their voices still trembled with emotion, ‘what a fright you have given us! Where have you been?’

‘They were giving a ball in their night-gowns on the hill,’ replied Uncle Bernard, who felt inclined to laugh, and was only restrained by the visible agitation and anxiety of his sister-in-law. ‘One thing is certain, and that is that they have caught cold. William is already coughing.’

It was true. A fit of coughing was heard under one of the great-coats.

‘We will never do it again, mamma; we will be good always,’ repeated the children.

They were put quickly into warm beds; and Mrs. de Flavie and Aunt Alice would not leave them till they heard from their regular, gentle breathing that they were well asleep. No scolding had been given them, fear had been too great for that; but the next day they were forbidden to get up, they had violent colds and coughs.

As soon as Gaston was dressed, he trotted into Catherine’s room to keep her company. He hastened to inform her that his nose had

just been bleeding, an event which he seemed to think quite a danger, and at the same time an honour.

‘Does your nose b’eed?’

‘No, my nose does not bleed; I have a cold.’

‘I t’ought your nose bled, as you are in bed. *My* nose bled!’

Gaston brought a chair, and scrambled on to his cousin’s bed. The bleeding began again in a minute. The little boy was quite frightened.

‘More b’ood! more b’ood!’ he repeated in an awe-struck voice, which produced a great effect upon Catherine.

However, the bleeding stopped again, and to make Gaston keep quiet, Catherine lent him her theatre of little figures. She cast a longing eye on him as he played, but her nurse made her keep still, and would not let her have her arms out of bed. The little boy amused himself for some time on the

carpet, and then, tired of exhibiting his dolls to the fire-guard or to the arm-chair, he rose, and stood his theatre up in the window-seat. Then, putting on a grave expression, and raising his eyes frequently towards the sky, he began dancing his dolls about again.

‘What are you doing, Gaston?’ cried Catherine at last.

‘I am p’aying at t’eatre to amoose God, who is in heaven.’

‘I don’t know whether that will amuse Him,’ answered Catherine gravely.

‘How tan God get up into heaven? There is not a ’taircase nor a ladder.’

Catherine knew not what answer to make, and Gaston, without further inquiries, continued his play. The little girl was beginning to get tired of bed. William would have been of the same opinion if he had been able to communicate his impressions to her; but that was impossible, and this forced separation

was not the least of their misfortunes. They did not thoroughly recover for a week ; and I can assure you they never again entertained any wish to promenade about the garden in their night-gowns.







## CHAPTER VII.

### *THE LEAGUE.*

THE children had a writing master named Mr. Robin. He was an excellent man, but he found these five pupils more difficult to manage than all his school-children. Not that they were very naughty, but they were full of life and movement, and he was wonderfully patient—too much so, for if he had been less gentle, the children would have stood in awe of him, which they did not at all as it was.

Gaston was the only one who had not begun

to learn to write, but he was always with William and Catherine; and I must confess that whenever there was any mischief afloat, all social barriers were effaced, there was no difference between *elders and youngsters*. When they expected Mr. Robin, they were only five children who had made up their minds to delay their lesson as long as possible.

Had Mrs. de Flavier or Aunt Alice known what a trial of patience the children were to their master, they would have interfered; but they had not an idea of it, as the good man never complained. So, no sooner had the sentinel, whom the others despatched to keep watch, seen Mr. Robin coming, than he gave the alarm, and the whole band of plotters scampered off as fast as possible. In a moment they were at the farther end of the park, panting for breath, it is true, but delighted to think five minutes at least must elapse before they could be in their places beginning their lesson.

Sometimes, however, Mrs. de Flavier would summon the runaways. They would hear a clear voice resound through the garden : ‘Come, children, Mr. Robin is here ;’ and then they knew they must obey and be at their post in the school-room without a moment’s delay. But, unfortunately for Mr. Robin, it was not always so.

One memorable day, when the accomplices had been hidden for some time, they heard Mr. Robin’s voice near to their hiding-place ; he had sought long, for they were at the bottom of the garden. Quick as lightning they darted up a side path, and tearing along like mad things, dragging the *youngsters* after them, the three *elders* attained the school-room. It had once been a bed-room, and the bed was still in a recess shut in by curtains. Pauline scrambled on to the bed (luckily there were no bedclothes), and when the others had done the same, she carefully closed the curtains. She had only just done so when Mr. Robin’s step was heard

in the passage ; a moment more, and his voice was heard saying, as if to himself :

‘ Well, really, this is odd ; the gardener told me he had seen them running towards the house.’

Harry very nearly betrayed them all by a loud laugh, but suppressed it in time.

The other children looked at him in silence, for they saw how contracted his features were by his efforts not to laugh. They knew by experience that Harry would not be able to hold out long ; he was subject to a strange laugh, beginning like a sneeze, and ending in a peal of prolonged, irresistible, and contagious laughter.

Mr. Robin’s hand was on the handle of the door ; he called for the last time :

‘ Children, are you there ?’

No answer. Elizabeth arrested William in an imprudent attempt to peep from behind the curtain.

‘ It was too bad of you, Harry,’ she said,

when Mr. Robin had left the room ; 'you nearly betrayed us all. How much better it would be if there were no boys !'

'And men could do very well without women too,' returned Harry.

'Who would make their shirts, I should like to know ?'

'Why, tailors, of course. They would learn; there's nothing so very difficult in that. And if there were no men, you wouldn't have any houses !'

'Women would learn to build them. You'd soon see how badly off you would be if there were no women !'

'Hush ! here comes Mr. Robin,' said Catherine.

Oh, terror ! Mr. Robin was not alone. In reasonable despair he had been to fetch Mrs. de Flavier, who entered, followed by Aunt Alice.

'Children, if you are anywhere here, come out directly !'

At the same instant, Aunt Alice, guided by a sudden inspiration, drew aside the curtains and disclosed to Mr. Robin's astonished view five children, huddled together in all kinds of



extraordinary attitudes. Harry's inclination to laugh was quite over, and even if he had still had any tendency that way, Mrs. de Flavier's severe words would rapidly have dispelled it.

' This kind of amusement is perfectly

ridiculous and silly. Mind you do not try it again, or the consequences will be serious. Take your places at once, and do not let me hear a single word.'

Nothing humiliated the children more than to be called silly, besides which, they felt they had been naughty, and deserved a scolding. So they got down one by one from the bed, and two minutes later were writing away with the diligence of children who had never been naughty in their lives. Their attention, however, was not too much given to their copies to hear what was going on. The two ladies were congratulating Mr. Robin (who, besides his other qualities, was an excellent school-master) upon another '*honourable mention*' he had just gained. Mr. Robin was in a great state of delight. Mrs. de Flavie and Mrs. Bernard told the children to be very good, and left the room to receive a visitor.

Silence reigned for some time; but the day was not destined to end peaceably. The

children were excited by their past naughtiness, and whether or not they desired to be punished, the children did all they could to merit it. All of a sudden Elizabeth exclaimed :

‘ Mr. Robin, we must go and say “ How do you do ? ” to the lady in the drawing-room ; mamma always sends for us . ’

The children delighted in visitors, because they often came just at the time of their writing lesson. They used to rush off to say ‘ How do you do ? ’ to the ladies, and afterwards took the same opportunity to have a run in the garden before returning to their work.

To-day, however, their hopes were frustrated.

‘ If your mamma wishes you to go, she will send for you ; if not, you will not leave your lesson ; you have wasted quite enough time already . ’

Silence prevailed again for some time. Catherine was the first to break it. The



storm was brewing, it did not need much to bring it to a climax.

‘Mr. Robin, I wish you would not put me in a house.’

This was the name given by the children to Mr. Robin’s posture, when he stood behind any one to set a copy.

‘Catherine, be quiet; I can’t write!’

‘My pen is bad, Mr. Robin,’ cried Harry.

Meanwhile Elizabeth and Pauline were resting from their labours and indulging in a little conversation. They were wondering what an ‘honourable mention’ was, and William, who was listening, suddenly exclaimed in a mocking tone :

‘Ah! the honourable mention! the honourable mention!’ And at the same time, Pauline, not wishing to be behindhand in mischief, began saying: ‘Cock-a-doodle-do! the honourable mention! cock-a-doodle-do!’ and the whole table resounded with the same cry, which every moment grew louder.

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Mr. Robin.



The children's conduct was inexcusable. To jeer and laugh at that which was to their master such a joy and honour was exceedingly naughty. The only thing that can be said in their defence is, that to them the term 'honourable mention' was gibberish; they did not know what it meant, nor had they any idea what pain they were causing Mr. Robin. He told them several times to be quiet, but all to no avail; they were over-excited, and only set each other on to cry the louder.

Suddenly a dead silence succeeded to the tumult. Mr. Robin had opened the door, and his voice was heard in the next room saying to Mrs. de Flavier, who had just come in, 'Madam, I cannot manage the children to-day.'

The culprits began to write assiduously; Harry's pen had improved, and one might have placed a whole house on Catherine's back without any objection from her. Pauline and William worked even more diligently than

the others, they felt they were the most guilty. Mrs. de Flavier came to the door ; her voice was dry and stern.

‘ Really, children, I think you are dreaming !



Are you out of your minds ? One would think you were little savages !’

There was no answer ; no sound was audible but the scratching of the pens on the paper. The children knew well they

were to hear something more, and they had not to wait long.

‘You will have no dessert, and you will all go to bed directly after dinner!’

Elizabeth and Pauline were too proud to cry, and Catherine and William, following their example, did not shed a tear. Besides which, the punishment was upon all alike, which greatly diminished it, and humiliated them less!

‘Of course, no one can have a good mark,’ said Mr. Robin at the end of the lesson. The children did not insist; they left the room in silence, feeling sorry to have caused their master any pain, but prevented by false pride from telling him so.

However, the next day they were at work a quarter of an hour before the time, and had brought Mr. Robin a little basket of strawberries, gathered for him in the wood. He thanked them, and seemed very much touched by their little attention; he was quite disposed

to overlook what had passed the day before, on condition they promised to be good. The children readily gave their word, and from that time the writing lessons were less stormy.





## CHAPTER VIII.

### *JUVENILE ACTING.*

‘WHAT can we do for Aunt Aubry’s birthday?’ This question had puzzled the children for some days.

‘Suppose we work an arm-chair cover for her?’ said Pauline.

‘No; let’s make some worsted-work for the sofa. She often lies on the sofa when she has rheumatism.’



‘But, my dear Harry, you don’t know what it is! We should never have time to work a chair or a sofa; Aunt Aubry’s birthday is in a month! What can we do, Uncle Bernard?’

‘Make a large wooden horse, like the one the Greeks left at the gates of Troy.’

‘A wooden horse!’

‘Make a coach and four.’

‘Uncle!’

‘Make a summer-house at the bottom of the garden. Turn the course of the stream, and make it pass before the house. Knock down the wall.’

‘Uncle Bernard! Uncle Bernard! you are proposing all kinds of ridiculous things! We want you to suggest something sensible!’ cried all the children.

‘Oh, I see! something sensible,—something in Aunt Alice’s style,—something real,—something’—

Elizabeth had risen with dignity, saying :

‘ Uncle Bernard, when you have done laughing at us, we will come back again !’

Elizabeth had scarcely got out these majestic words when Mr. Bernard de Flavier made a dart at her, and in spite of all her efforts seated her in a large easy-chair. Aunt Alice just then came into the room, and folding her arms, she stood looking at her husband, saying :

‘ Who would think he had been married six years, and was the father of a family ?’ Aunt Alice’s voice sounded grave, melancholy even; and if the corners of her expressive mouth had not betrayed a great desire to laugh, one would have thought she was solemnly reflecting on the vicissitudes of married life. ‘ He is not a bit improved by his marriage !’ she said.

‘ Ah ! what do you know about it ? Very likely I should have been still worse if it had not been for this little lady they call “ Aunt Alice ! ”’

‘We want to do something in honour of Aunt Aubry’s birthday, and Uncle Bernard only laughs at us, and won’t give us any ideas.’

‘Then I will. We will talk over it together.’

‘No, that you won’t. Uncle Bernard is always rejected for Aunt Alice, and I will not have it so. I will give you an idea. Learn some scenes from *Les Plaideurs*, and act them on Aunt Aubry’s birthday.’

‘But won’t it be very difficult?’ asked Elizabeth.

‘It is certain you will not act so well as they do at the *Théâtre français*. But no one will expect that, you may be sure. Come, give me a *Racine*, and we will begin.’

No further objection was made. Had the children been older, and known *Les Plaideurs* better, the undertaking would doubtless have seemed to them more formidable; but none of them had ever been to the theatre. It was

suggested they should act ; and to act, all that was needful was to learn the piece by heart, and then to repeat it with all kinds of gesticulations. What could be simpler ?

Mrs. Aubry was the only person who was not to know about the acting. The scenes were chosen, and the parts allotted to the different actors. Elizabeth was to be *La Comtesse de Pimbêche* ; Harry was to personate *Chicaneau* ; Pauline, *Petit Jean* ; William, *l'Intimé* ; Catherine, *Perrin Dandin*.

The children set to work diligently to learn their parts, and were to be seen at it in season and out of season, morning, noon, and night, waylaying everybody to hear them.

Pauline had a good deal of trouble with *Petit Jean's* part. She knew *Perrin Dandin's*, *Chicaneau's*, the *Comtesse's* parts well enough ; but as for her own, she never could manage to get it into her head. When one takes pains, however, one ends by vanquishing all difficulties, and Pauline was no exception to the

rule. When their parents were tired of hearing them, the children recited their parts to each other; and more than one afternoon was spent in the garden, where *Chicaneau* and the *Comtesse* spent their time in twitting each other something in this way:

‘Now, William, work away! You will never know your part; and besides that, you will give yourself the stomach-ache!’

William was sitting on the ground with his book, digging his teeth into a green apple, under pretext of learning more easily.

‘I am working, I tell you, *Madame la Comtesse*. Never fear, I shall know my part.’ And William, throwing away the rest of his apple, leant over his book again.

‘Well, I wish he would die and leave us in peace!’ cried Harry, who was leaning over the back of a garden-seat, learning.

‘Who?’

‘Why, *Léandre*! We have nobody to play his part, and every minute I find myself

repeating, "Je meurs pour Isabelle." If he wanted to die so much, why didn't he make haste over it, and not talk so much about it? It is tiresome, really!' And Harry struck the book with his fist.

'But he doesn't die,' said Elizabeth. 'You ought to remember, he marries *Isabelle*.'

'Well, then, he shouldn't go on saying he should die. Will you hear me, *Petit Jean*?'

Harry had only just finished his piece when William asked to be heard; then Pauline fancied she had forgotten her part, and one of her companions had to leave off to hear her say her tirade, which she knew fairly well on the whole. Elizabeth and Harry gave the others great uneasiness; just at the most critical moment, when *La Comtesse* and *Chicaneau* dispute, they had a habit of bursting out laughing. This happened regularly every time they repeated the parts.

'You will laugh when we act in public,'

repeated Pauline; 'and that will be dreadful!'

'But how can I help it?'

'And I'm sure I can't,' said the *Comtesse*.

'But I have an idea. Let's turn our backs.'

'You can't be turning your backs upon each other on the grand day!'

'At all events, let's try now. We will see.'

The first time was a failure. Pauline saw the dangerous moment approaching, and heard a change in *Chicaneau's* voice.

'Harry, I forbid you to laugh!' But it was too late; *Chicaneau* was too far gone, and the *Comtesse*, who was hearing him repeat his part, burst out laughing in her turn. 'You must just go over that part again and again till you have cured yourselves of laughing,' said Pauline decidedly.

'There, Harry, you began that time! the *Comtesse* would have been quite calm if you had not begun!'



They had a habit of bursting out laughing.—P. 167.





‘No,’ said Elizabeth, ‘I did not feel inclined to laugh at all. It was all Harry’s fault! he set me off!’

By dint of trouble and patience, the desired effect was obtained. When the actors had repeated the same page thirty times running, they succeeded in keeping their countenances, even without completely turning their backs to each other. They gave a sidelong glance at each other, and this was a great improvement.

‘Oh, bother these *Chicaneaus*, *Petit Jeans*, *Intimés*, and Company!’ cried Harry, stretching and yawning. ‘It is very nice to listen to; but when it comes to learning it by heart, it’s quite another thing.’

‘Well, we shall manage it now, though sometimes I have felt quite in despair about it.’

Just then up came Catherine.

‘Pauline, Elizabeth, Harry, William, do come and see what an immense snake Gaston and I have found in the shrubbery! It has got horns!’

‘ I hope you did not go near it ? ’

‘ Oh no ! But do come and see it, all of you ! ’

All the children ran off to see it, and a



moment later were in the shrubbery, where they found Gaston standing at a respectful distance from a large snake, which he was considering with great attention.

‘What a great thing!’ cried Elizabeth.

‘It is only a common snake, I think,’ said Harry.

‘But common snakes do not have horns!’

‘No more they do. I don’t know what it is. I have never seen a snake with horns before.’

The reptile’s head was in reality furnished with a pair of rather long horns, which seemed to move about.

‘I don’t know how William and I could ever have been so fond of worms,’ said Catherine.

‘I should like to get a stick and poke his tail to make him move,’ said Harry.

But Pauline did not approve of this.

‘No, Harry, let him alone. I don’t at all want him to run after us.’

‘Just look,’ cried William; ‘his horns seem to be getting shorter!’

It was a fact. The horns were shorter and nearer to each other than before.

‘I shall go and fetch Louis,’ said Harry, ‘I must know what kind of a creature it is.’

The gardener was at work a little way off; he arrived in a moment, spade in hand.

‘It’s only a common snake, Master Harry; it’s quite harmless.’

‘Well, but common snakes haven’t got horns!’

‘It has scarcely any horns now,’ cried Pauline. ‘They are only half as long as they were.’

The gardener stooped down to examine the snake, and then he laughed and said:

‘The horns you speak of are only the hind legs of a toad he was eating.’

‘A toad?’ cried Elizabeth.

‘Fancy eating a toad in one mouthful!’ said Pauline.

‘He shan’t finish his dinner,’ said Louis, cutting the snake in two with his spade.

‘Oh, how horrid!’

The same exclamation rose to the lips of Catherine, Elizabeth, and Pauline; they ran off, followed by Gaston, who had become quite pale.

‘One can’t keep snakes, however,’ said the gardener, not over pleased at the children’s emotion.

But they did not like to see things suffer, and only ran the faster. A minute later, Harry and William called them to come back.

‘The snake has gone; Louis has carried it off. Come and see the toad.’

‘The snake was eating up the toad alive when Louis killed it, and it spat it out again then.’

On being assured of the disappearance of the snake, the three sisters hastened into the shrubbery.

‘I assure you it is not there now. Come and see; the toad is quite well, only a little faint.’

There was the toad, with all its limbs intact. It seemed a little stunned by the treatment it had undergone, and did not stir; otherwise it was perfectly well.

‘Go and get a watering-pot, Harry,’ said Pauline. ‘We’ll pour a little water on its head, that will do it good.’

Pauline was right. When the toad felt the cold water, it began to move, and then to crawl. Two hours later the children returned to the spot, but the toad was gone, probably to relate his misadventures to his bereaved family!

The eve of the grand day arrived; the children knew their parts; their two mothers had already been present at two very successful rehearsals; the dresses were all ready. *Perrin Dandin* was charming in his square cap,—a work of art concocted by Aunt Alice. Catherine, during the last three days, had been practising jumping over chairs and tables; it was necessary that at the moment

when *Perrin Dandin* says, 'Ça, pour nous élargir, sautons par la fenêtre!' the leap should be well and gracefully taken. *Dandin* was to jump from the edge of a book-case half-hidden by a screen, and there was every reason to hope that this part of the programme at least would be a success.

'It is to be hoped *Chicaneau* and I shall not begin to laugh to-morrow evening.'

'Oh, you did not laugh at the rehearsal, so you won't laugh at the grand moment,' said Pauline.

'I hope not.'

Pauline trembled; the *Comtesse's* tone was doubtful. At last the time came. The theatricals were to take place just after dinner. The theatre, formed of screens, was all ready. The children left the room before dinner was ended, to go and dress up. Dessert was of very little consequence when one's name was *Perrin Dandin*, *La Comtesse*, or *Chicaneau*.



Mrs. de Flavier and her sister-in-law had made the dresses, and now came up to put the finishing touches. Catherine's square cap had to be adjusted, and the *Comtesse's* hair to be powdered. She looked rather young, but the fault was common to all the actors, and it did not do to be too particular.

Pauline had to appear first on the scene; her brothers and sisters felt much for her.

'I should not mind so much if I did not begin with such a long tirade,' said the poor little actress with uneasiness. "'Ma foi, sur l'avenir bien fou qui se fiera . . . tel qui rit vendredi—"' Oh yes, I know it; that's one good thing!'

Mrs. de Flavier had undertaken to act as prompter, and the children reckoned a good deal on her aid in critical moments.

So Pauline entered upon the scene. All the lights seemed to shine upon her at once. All eyes were fixed upon her. This immediately acted fatally upon her. *Petit Jean*

forgot all his tirade; not a single word would return to his memory.

Pauline felt eternal gratitude to the prompter for coming to her aid at this cruel



moment. When once she knew the opening lines, all the rest followed easily enough; she had not a moment's hesitation. We will not here speak of the acting; it would, no doubt, have scandalised an actor of the six-and-

thirtieth order. One thing only could not have been better, and that was *Perrin Dandin's* leap. Very likely the real *Perrin Dandin* had not such bright eyes as Catherine, but in the children's opinion that was no disadvantage.

Pauline's fears for the gravity of the *Comtesse* and *Chicaneau* were well founded. She could see from the hall the expression of their countenances, and she anxiously awaited the critical moment; suddenly she detected a little tremble in *Chicaneau's* voice, and knew he was trying to suppress his inclination to laugh. The struggle was not a long one, *Chicaneau* was fairly overcome; he burst into one of those well-known laughs of which he only knew the secret. The *Comtesse* could not resist the contagion, and the two actors, who ought to have been disputing and looking furious, were roaring with laughter. The infection spread from the performers to the spectators; Uncle Bernard began to laugh,

and for some time the whole assembly laughed in unison, unable to suppress their merriment.

At last quiet was re-established, and the performance was brought to a happy conclusion.

The children were greatly applauded. Mrs. Aubry declared she had enjoyed the whole thing very much; the actors went to bed highly satisfied with the events of the day, and for a long while kept their surnames. Elizabeth went by the name of *La Comtesse*; William was called *L'Intimé*; Pauline, *Petit Jean*; and when Harry teased his sisters, they retaliated by calling him *Chicaneau*.





## CHAPTER IX.

### *THE FIRE.*

‘No, I will not always be the conquered one!’

Mrs. de Flavier heard these words under her window one fine summer’s day. The discussion was an animated one.

‘I will not be a subject; I am the king of Ostrasia!’

‘William, who is the king of Eustria, is

sometimes beaten too ; if your soldiers fight badly, whose fault is that ? ’

‘ All the same, I will not be a subject,’ said Catherine, who was king of Ostrasia.

‘ You are a subject, now you are conquered,’ said Harry warmly.

‘ Well, let’s begin the battle again.’

The kings of Ostrasia and Neustria went on, and were soon heard calling William.

‘ Come, we’re going to begin the battle again ! ’

The three imaginary kings went up-stairs to Harry’s room, and set three armies of tin soldiers in battle array upon the table. When all was ready, each monarch armed himself with some marbles, and, in turn, bombarded the enemy’s camp.

‘ My commander-in-chief has fallen ! ’ cried the king of Eustria.

‘ Never mind,’ answered the king of Neustria in great excitement, ‘ let’s go on all the same. Two of my generals have fallen also, but

the rest of the army are fighting bravely. Forward, my brave fellows! courage!’

‘Ah!’ cried the king of Ostrasia, nearly crying with excitement, ‘I’ve made a great breach in the king of Eustria’s army!’

The king of Eustria saw that things were going against him, and the end was that he was conquered.

‘I do not care,’ said he magnanimously.

‘I should not like to be a subject,’ repeated the little king of Ostrasia.

‘Sire,’ returned the fallen king, addressing himself to his victorious foe, ‘I announce to you that I shall soon declare war against you.’

And, in fact, next morning Catherine brought her eldest brother a letter from William in the following words :

‘SIRE,—You have defeated me, but I declare war against you afresh, for I will not be your subject.—THE KING OF EUSTRIA.’

These constant wars were an inexhaustible source of amusement to the children. They

ended and recommenced without cessation. Sometimes the king of Eustria, sometimes one of the other sovereigns, was beaten, but they went on all the same with energy and vivacity.

‘My soldiers are tired, they refuse to fight any longer,’ said Catherine one day; ‘let’s have a game at marbles. Where’s Pauline?’

Notwithstanding her mature age, Pauline had a decided taste for marbles; so her brothers and sisters were greatly amazed to hear she would not come and play.

‘Why, what have you got to do?’

‘Nothing; but I can’t come.’

‘Why?’

‘Mamma doesn’t like me to be always playing boys’ games.’

‘Why? Marbles is not a rough game at all.’

‘No, but one is obliged to be on all fours all the time nearly, and I have promised not to play any more.’



Harry, William, and Catherine were very sorry, but Pauline was inexorable. She did not, however, show them a piece of paper, on which were inscribed some resolutions known only to herself and Elizabeth.

The act was conceived in the following terms :—

‘ I promise not to play at marbles any more, because it is a boys’ game and I am too big. I write down my resolution so that I may keep it better, and not forget it. I will never play at marbles again, however much the others may try to induce me. This is my promise.

‘ PAULINE.’

After such a heroic resolution, Pauline felt like a person who had renounced the world and all its gaieties. But she kept her word, and when Mrs. de Flavier came into the garden and saw Harry and William stretched on the ground at play, and Pauline gravely

contemplating them, she gave her child a loving look, which went straight to her heart.

In the same way did Mrs. de Flavier smile as she went round as usual that evening to



kiss her sleeping children. It was a fine evening, and the windows were open ; Aunt Alice's voice was heard humming a tune, when, all of a sudden, a cry resounded through the garden :

‘Fire! fire! the village is on fire!’

In an instant Mr. de Flavier had reached the window; a cloud of white smoke interspersed with bright sparks rose into the air. No flames were as yet visible.



It was the gardener who, running along under the windows, had given the alarm.

‘Hush, Louis! and instead of standing there calling out, go down to the village. Holloa, Bernard, there’s a fire!’

Mr. Bernard de Flavier was already at the foot of the stairs.

‘I don’t think the fire has spread much as yet; we shall get there in time. I told Alice not to come.’

‘Much good may that do! I bet you anything Alice and Helen will be down in the village almost as soon as we are.’

The two brothers hurried on in silence; the nearer they got, the more distinctly they heard the cries which issued from the village.

‘Fire! fire! old Father Antoine’s house and barn are on fire!’

‘No, it is Dame Buchet’s cottage!’

‘Ah! here comes the master!’

‘Now, Vivier, you must bring all the buckets you can get together, and make a chain as quickly as possible.’

‘Bring a ladder! bring a ladder!’ was heard on all sides; ‘they say there’s a child asleep in Father Antoine’s barn!’

The two gentlemen set to work, directing and encouraging every one, and engaging them to bring out all possible live stock from barns and stables.

‘Bernard, Bernard, help me; there are some children up there!’

Mr. Bernard de Flavier turned, and became pale as death.

‘Alice! where are you? For the love of Heaven, answer!’

‘Here, up-stairs. Helen is bringing out one of the children now, and I have another in my arms. Bring a ladder!’

Mr. Bernard de Flavier said not a word. Clenching his teeth, he ran up to a man who was coming along with a ladder, tore it from him, and set it up against the house. It was too short!

‘Let yourself down by the wall, and I will receive you in my arms. The ladder is long enough for that.’

‘First the child!’ said Aunt Alice firmly.



'Lean out and hand me the child.'—P. 193.

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‘Lean out and hand me the child.’—P. 193.





'I cannot see you, Bernard, the smoke is so blinding! Where are you?'

'Just underneath the window. Lean out and hand me the child.' Mr. Bernard de Flavier did not try to persuade his wife to descend first; he knew it would have been lost time.

Aunt Alice leant out of the window, the smoke was suffocating, the floor was on fire, the flames were getting nearer and nearer.

'Don't all get on the ladder, good people! It will break. One man is enough to take the child.'

A little bundle of clothes and flannels was safely deposited in the strong arms of one of the young men. Mr. Bernard de Flavier was again at the top of the ladder.

'Hang on with your hands to the window-sill, Alice; I am quite close.'

'But I can't see you, Bernard, the smoke stifles me. Where are you?'

'Here, just beneath the window. Do trust

to me, Alice, and let yourself go; you shall not fall.'

The floor cracked, the cradle in which the children had lain was in flames, the window-sill was burning hot.

'Alice, Alice! for the love of Heaven!'

'God have mercy upon us!'

Aunt Alice got on to the window-sill, and holding on by the bars of the window, let herself down along the burning wall.

'Bernard! Bernard! where are you?'

She received no answer, but she felt her husband's strong arm round her; and leaving hold of the window, she let herself down into his grasp.

Up to that moment there had been a dead silence, but now arose a cry of—

'Hurrah! she is safe!'

The fire was not extinguished, but it was less violent; Mr. Bernard de Flavien laid his wife down on the grass, and one of the village women brought her some water. When she

had drunk it, she came to herself. She tightened her hold on her husband's hand.

'How you do tremble!' she said, laughing softly; 'I do not tremble.'

'Thanks be to God!' said Uncle Bernard in a low voice.

'But where is Helen?'

'Mrs. de Flavier is near here,' said a girl in a confused way.

'Where is she? I must see her! Did she succeed in saving the children?' Aunt Alice had risen, but she was not so strong as she thought, and fell back upon the grass again. Just then Mr. de Flavier came in sight, and with him three men bearing a mattress, on which lay Mrs. de Flavier. She seemed to have fainted.

'Go and fetch the doctor, and tell him to make haste!'

'What is the matter with her? Did she get safely down the stairs?'

'I found her at the other side of the barn;

in one arm she held the elder of the children, her other arm was hanging at her side, and she was sitting on the ground unable to move.'

'I have never seen the master cry,' said one of the farm-servants to another; 'he is not crying now, but there is a curious sound about his voice.'

The fire was nearly out, there were only a few timbers burning still on the ground. Two houses and a barn had been destroyed.

'Fortunately they were mostly all empty,' said the villagers; 'the hay isn't carried yet, and there was time to save the furniture.'

'I carried two large pans to Mother Mauduit's, and I helped to form the chain!'

Mr. de Flavier, turning round, saw Harry, Elizabeth, and Pauline. Their faces and hands were black; Harry had put on his waistcoat and trousers, the others had slipped a petticoat over their night-gowns; they had on their slippers without stockings.

‘We helped, papa; we were of some use!’

‘But what’s the matter with mamma?’

‘She hurt her arm saving a baby. Don’t go near her, leave her alone!’

Mrs. de Flavier was carried home. She did not recover consciousness at once,—not till the doctor, hastening to the house, had touched her arm and said:

‘It is broken, but it is only a simple fracture, I hope!’

Mrs. Aubry was confined to her bed by an attack of rheumatism, so she was not able to help in any way, much to her vexation.

‘Fires break out, arms are broken, lives are risked,’ she said sadly; ‘and here am I, obliged to lie in bed as if there was nothing to do.’

‘But, aunt, you have plenty to do,’ repeated Aunt Alice, who was quite herself again, and thinking of everything; ‘what should we do without you?’

‘Has Mr. Chapier gone out of Helen’s room?’

‘Yes, he has set her arm, and he hopes it will not be a serious matter. Helen is asleep. Albert is with her.’

‘And it is quite time you should go to bed, my dear. Is Bernard still down in the village?’

‘Yes; he wanted to make quite sure all was safe.’

There was less loss of property than had been at first supposed. Father Antoine was a well-to-do farmer, and the house just burnt down by no means represented the whole of his wealth.

‘And it was insured, sir,’ he said to Mr. Bernard de Flavie, ‘and so was Mother Buchet’s! Good-night, sir.’

Mrs. de Flavie soon recovered the use of her arm. The villagers used to come up to the house every day in great numbers to ask after her, and would bring presents, such as

cherries, or a fine fat fowl, which they would offer, saying :

‘It will do you good, ma’am; eat it for your dinner, and see if it doesn’t.’

‘It is quite pleasant to have a broken arm when every one is so kind,’ said Mrs. de Flavier.

‘Pleasant indeed!’ said her husband. ‘I hope you will dispense with this sort of amusement, for I assure you it is no pleasure to me.’

‘I shall put out fires when I am a big boy,’ said Gaston.

‘When you are a big boy!’ said his mother; ‘you will have to wait a little for that.’

‘I don’t like being a little boy!’

‘Well, in order to grow big, you must eat a good deal, play a good deal, do a great many lessons, and run about a good deal; and having done all this, you will be big.’

‘And I must say a good many prayers too,’ added the child gravely.



His mother's only answer was a kiss. Gaston continued in a decided tone :

‘Yes, that’s it; I must do what you say, and then, when I am a big boy, I shall put out fires for poor people. I shall carry the water, as Harry did, and save pots and pans, like Elizabeth and Pauline.’

‘And *I* shall save little children,’ said Mrs. Bernard de Flavier softly; ‘nothing in all the world is so precious!’





## CHAPTER X.

### *PROFESSED COOKS.*

‘SHALL we let the boys in to-day, or lock the door?’

Pauline put this question to Elizabeth and Catherine one day when they were going to make some jam in their room. The three sisters had a delightful little copper preserving pan of their own, and twenty-four little jam-pots, and every year they were allowed to make some jam for the winter’s consumption. They had made six pots already, and to-day they

were going to make some red-currant jam. Should they, or should they not, allow the boys to share in their culinary operations?

‘You had better keep them out,’ said Elizabeth; ‘remember how troublesome they were last time.’

‘And then, Pauline, if you recollect, they would insist on eating all the scrapings.’

‘I agree with you. Besides, we cannot have a whole tribe in our room. Let’s go and gather the red currants.’

And the three sisters betook themselves to the kitchen - garden, armed with a large basket. There were plenty of currants to be had for the picking. The girls were getting on famously, their basket was nearly filled with the luscious red bunches of currants, when suddenly Elizabeth thought she heard the boys’ voices.

‘Let’s hide! let’s hide! Here they come! They will be sure to want to know what we are about.’

Without knowing it, the fugitives passed just in front of their pursuers, who were shouting with all their might :

‘Pauline! Elizabeth! Catherine! where are you off to? What have you got there?’

The sisters made no answer, but re-



doubled their speed; it was important to gain time.

‘Are you going to make some jam?’ said Harry.

Still no answer. The little cooks gained the house; they reckoned they should just

have time to get into their room and lock the door before the boys arrived.

Panting for breath, they rushed up-stairs; their room was on the third storey. They reached it, turned the key in the lock, and were safe. They got all the things ready, lighted the fire, and were beginning to strip the currants, when Elizabeth suddenly discovered that they had no sugar! .

‘I will go and get some from the kitchen; the boys will not see me if I go down the back stairs.’

Catherine left the room, Pauline carefully locking the door after her. A few moments later they heard her on her way back, screaming:

‘Pauline, Pauline! make haste and open the door, the boys are after me!’

Elizabeth ran to the door, and saw at the end of the corridor Catherine approaching, closely followed by Harry and William.

‘Be quick, be quick! you will have time!’ said Pauline to encourage her.

Catherine was not a second too soon; the key had scarcely turned in the lock when thumps were heard at the door.

‘I know you are jam-making; let us in!’ cried Harry.

‘It’s no use denying it,’ added William; ‘we saw you had some red currants, and Catherine went to fetch some sugar.’

No answer was made to this; the cooks calmly went on stripping their currants.

‘Mayn’t we come in?’ asked Harry after a pause.

‘No!’ answered Elizabeth; ‘you were so tiresome last time, you nearly spoilt our cherry jam, and you ate almost all the scrapings.’

‘Oh! so this time you mean to keep them all for yourselves!’ cried William indignantly.

‘No, we will save some for your lunch,’ said Pauline.

This gracious promise did not satisfy the boys.

‘It’s not fair,’ they said; ‘we have just as much right to make jam as you have.’

‘All right, make some, then; we don’t hinder you!’

The three sisters went on very quietly with their work. They had their preserving pan, sugar, and currants; no one could disturb them. The boys went on kicking and thumping at the door for a little while, and then all was still. Elizabeth then discovered what she had not seen before, a great rent in her frock.

‘I must have torn it in the currant bushes,’ said the poor girl in despair. ‘What will mamma say? This is the fourth frock I have torn this week, and last week I tore five. Oh dear, what will mamma say?’

Elizabeth managed to tear quite an extraordinary number of frocks in one summer. Happily this devastation only lasted a few months; but during that period, Elizabeth tore a frock a day on an average, and that not

in a way easily mended, but generally a terrible, long, zigzag tear.

‘I really shall buy you iron frocks,’ said her mother sometimes; ‘I hope you will not tear them!’

Elizabeth had always the best intentions, and after a warning of this kind would go out, looking carefully before her, turning neither to right nor left, and thus hoping to avoid all danger. But ill-luck always befell the unfortunate frock; she would forget about taking care, and somehow or other always came home with a torn one.

‘What will mamma say?’ she repeated.

‘She won’t say anything, for I think we can manage to mend that. I will try as soon as we have put on the currants.’

But the jam did not get on very fast; soon it was found there was not enough fruit.

‘I’ll go and get some more,’ said Pauline. ‘Catherine has had one battle with the boys;



that's enough for her. I shall try to keep out of their way.'

She hurried out with her basket; but if she had any hopes of eluding Harry and William, she was mistaken. Scarcely had she reached the garden, than up they came.

'What! gathering more currants?' said they.

'Yes; we have not enough.'

Pauline was prepared for a struggle. But not at all; the boys, instead of saying anything disagreeable, offered to help her gather the currants. This much surprised her, and she replied that it was not worth while, she did not require very many.

'Never mind, we will help you; it will be done all the quicker.'

'That will do,' said Pauline, 'don't gather any more.'

The boys desisted; but as soon as their sister prepared to take up her basket and go, they followed her. Pauline stopped and

asked with interest what they were doing when she came out.

‘ We were building a fortress in the shrubbery.’

‘ Well, are you not going on with it ? ’

‘ Oh, we are in no hurry ; the fortress can wait a little. We are coming with you.’

Their intention was obvious. That which they had failed in doing by might, they now intended to perform by stratagem.

‘ Oh, I don’t require an escort,’ said Pauline.

‘ No one will eat me up on my way.’

It was no good. Pauline found the two boys were bent on accompanying her ; they even offered to carry her basket, but this she would not allow.

When they reached the door, her escort seemed loath to leave her.

‘ I am not going to my room just yet,’ she said, ‘ I am going first to speak to mamma.’

She was, in fact, thinking of paying her mother a visit, so as to be rid of the boys.

‘Oh, we are in no hurry,’ said they in a very amiable tone.

‘In a hurry about what?’ said Pauline, determined to come to an understanding; ‘what are you waiting for?’

‘Oh, nothing. We are taking a walk!’

Pauline changed her tactics; it was no good being amiable, she must try some other means.

‘I don’t think I shall go to mamma, after all; I am going up-stairs to my room, but I warn you that we will not have you there!’

‘We shall soon see that,’ cried the boys, laying aside all attempt at amiability.

All three reached the bedroom door at the same time, and Pauline shouted:

‘Don’t open the door, the boys are with me! We shall have a struggle, but they shan’t come in, say what they may!’

Pauline got as near the door as possible.

‘Now open the door!’ she cried.

But the boys were close at hand, and

slipped in at the same time, as had been expected. Pauline put her basket on the table, and rushed to help Elizabeth hold Harry.

‘We told you boys we would not have you here; go away!’

Catherine was struggling with William, while Pauline and Elizabeth pinioned Harry, and laid him on his back on the landing outside their door.

‘Hold him a minute, Elizabeth, while I go and help Catherine,’ said Pauline.

Elizabeth had some difficulty in retaining Harry in his undignified position.

‘If you stir an inch, Harry, I will sit upon you,’ she said at last, finding her strength failing.

William was easier to conquer than Harry. When he was turned out, and Pauline and Catherine were returning to their room in triumph, Elizabeth prepared to follow them; but Harry had not had time to get up before William began the assault again. Quick as lightning, Catherine seized a handful of

currants, and dashed them into the adversary's face. This bright idea was the saving of the cooks. William was so astonished at the novelty of the proceeding, that for a second he ceased his attack, but this second cost him



all ; the door was shut, and the three sisters shouted for victory, at which the boys uttered a cry of rage. They kicked at the door with all their might, but it was a strong one, as the sisters well knew. Rather ashamed of having

been defeated, Harry and William put on a grand air, and called :

‘ We are going away, naughty girls ; had we been three in number, as you are, you would not have conquered. You may keep your jam scrapings ; we do not want any of them ! ’

‘ We will eat them,’ answered the cooks.

Calm was restored ; the assailants returned to their fortress, and the girls to their jam. This succeeded very well in the end. Notwithstanding their protestations to the contrary, they saved some scrapings for their brothers, which were gladly accepted the day following, though pride prevented them from asking for any.

It has been seen that the children at La Ronceraye had a decided taste for cooking, but hitherto they had made nothing but cakes or jam. They now required a vaster field of labour, and one day they suggested to their parents that they should like to cook them a breakfast (*déjeuner à la fourchette*).

‘A breakfast!’ cried Mr. de Flavier; ‘why, it would be horrid.’

‘The dishes would be flavoured with cinders, and the gravy would be replaced by water,’ said Mr. Bernard de Flavier in a melancholy voice.

‘No, no,’ said Mrs. de Flavier; ‘the girls are capable of cooking a very fair breakfast, provided they do not undertake anything very difficult.’

‘Ah! this time we will have a finger in the pie,’ cried the boys; ‘the kitchen is large enough to hold us all!’

‘You may help to cook the breakfast,’ said Mrs. de Flavier, ‘on condition that you leave the difficult part to the girls.’

‘After all, we can make up for it at dinner, if the breakfast is uneatable,’ said Mr. de Flavier, who was not convinced.

‘You will eat such a good breakfast,—see if you don’t!—that you will not be able to eat any dinner,’ cried the children in chorus.

‘May we try to-morrow?’

‘Yes, if you like,’ said Mrs. de Flavier; ‘I will ask cook to give you all you want.’

‘Delightful! What a pity to-morrow is not come!’ said the children.

The next day came, and the bill of fare was decided upon. It was settled to have nothing to do with raw meat. Cook was rather indignant, but she was forced to give way.

This was the bill of fare :

Fried eggs.

Rissoles of fish.

Veal warmed up again (with plenty of gravy).

Slices of beef with vinegar and oil.

Potatoes (with plenty of butter).

Coffee, and little cakes.

‘If we cannot manage that, we shall be simpletons,’ said all the children.

It was therefore a question, not only of developing a professed culinary talent, but also of proving that the professed cooks were not simpletons.



‘You boys must wash the potatoes, and then peel them and put them in water. We have a great deal to do.’

Elizabeth began rolling out the paste for the cakes, and Pauline and Catherine chopped up the fish for the rissoles. These occupations did not take long—not long enough, for the children had begun operations at nine o’clock, and nothing could be put on the fire till half-past ten.

‘What shall we do till then?’ repeated the three boys, disconsolately leaning against the big table.

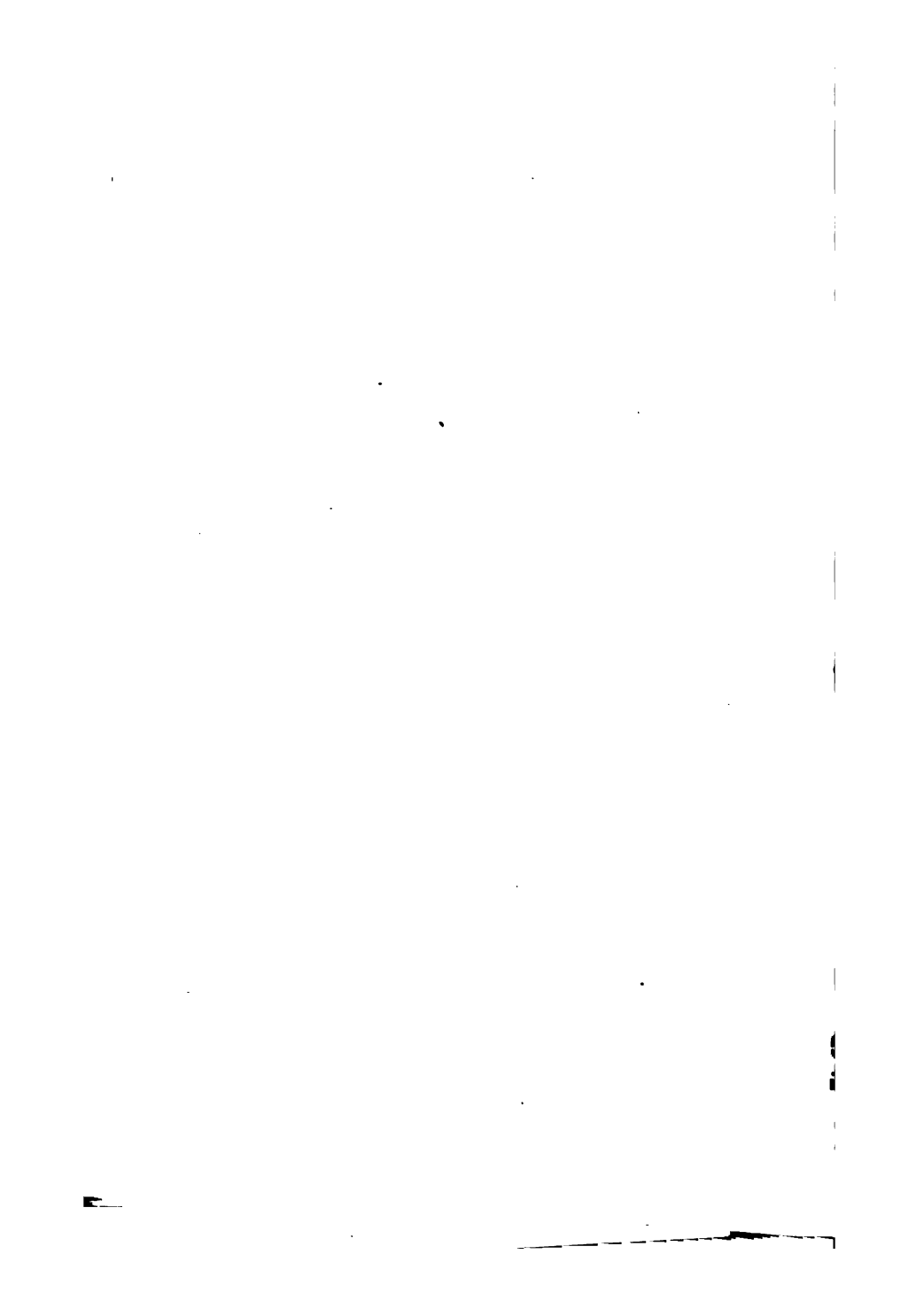
‘There’s nothing more to be done; let’s go for a walk,’ answered the others.

So the six cooks in their white aprons gravely left the kitchen one by one; then Harry discovered a football which had carelessly been left on the lawn, and they all had a good game of ball. The breakfast was for the time forgotten.

‘Oh, our cookery!’ cried Elizabeth. ‘It must be time to set the things on the fire.’



Professed cooks.—P. 215.  
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And cooks and scullery boys and maids scampered off to the scene of action.

Harry and William were already at work when the others came in, who said to them :

‘What are you about, boys?’

‘Oh, how you frightened me!’ said William. ‘I’ve spoilt one of the eggs; it’s all your fault.’

The unlucky wights had had the presumption to break the eggs, and the undertaking was a failure. One egg only was where it ought to have been—on the dish; a second was spilt upon the table, and the third on William’s pinafore.

‘They are most curious eggs,’ said Harry; ‘when one gives them a little rap, they do not break at all, but if they are knocked a little harder, they fly about in all directions.’

‘Let us do that,’ said Elizabeth, ‘or we shall have no eggs for breakfast. You can slice up the beef, and make the sauce for it.’

The boys were charmed to have a dish all to themselves, and left their sisters in

comparative peace, only giving them good advice from time to time, such as :

‘Don’t forget to put a good deal of gravy with the veal, and plenty of butter with the potatoes; cook never puts enough.’

At five minutes to eleven, all was ready. The children were in great glee.

‘Well, are you all roasted and boiled, and have each of you cut off one of your fingers?’ asked their father and uncle.

‘No, none of us are at all hurt, and you will soon see if you were right to doubt our skill.’

The professed cooks were rather puffed up by the joy of success, but that surprised no one; a first success is apt to turn the head a little. Neither butter nor jelly had been spared, which of course rendered the result all the better. The two gentlemen were quite astonished when they tasted the cakes and coffee.

‘We confess ourselves to have been in the wrong,’ they said; ‘we never thought you would have succeeded so well.’

‘I should like to know one thing,’ said Mrs. de Flavier, ‘and that is, what the breakfast has cost. Annette does not use so much butter and jelly in a whole day.’

‘Oh, it is only once in a way!’

‘And the parents are convinced of our talents,’ said Harry; ‘that proves the breakfast to have been successful. And the breakfast having been successful, proves we are not simpletons; so it was worth while to spend a little more than usual!’





## CHAPTER XI.

### *THE LAMB AND THE TWO EAGLES.*

‘WHAT do you say to our editing a newspaper? The parents read three or four a day. Very likely they would take in ours.’

‘A newspaper! How could we manage that? how should we get it printed?’

‘Oh, we need not have it printed, we could write it out.’

‘And who would write the articles?’

‘Why, we ourselves, of course ; nothing is easier. We shall discuss all sorts of subjects. You can write a story, I will write the articles, and we will give the news between us.’

‘Let’s try, let’s try ! But we had better find out first whether the parents will take it in or not.’

Their parents were rather astounded at the request, but they agreed to take in the newspaper, though they did not feel very sanguine as to the longevity of the publication.

‘It will only cost two francs (1s. 8d.),’ said the children, ‘and will appear every week. It will be very amusing.’

‘Amusing to us, or to you ? To those who pay, or to those who pocket the money ?’

‘Oh, to every one,’ said the children, laughing. ‘It will be a very interesting newspaper.’

The new publication made its appearance on a Friday. All the subscribers duly received their copies, and so they did the



week following. The children's Thursday half - holiday was spent in preparing the numbers. But before long the copies became



rare ; the subscribers were requested to lend about the few which still appeared.

‘The copies take so long to write out, and we do so want to play!’ said the children.

Their parents smiled.

At last the day came when the 'Ronceraye Gazette' disappeared altogether. The editors were tired of it; it took up all their spare time; the copying became a perfect nuisance to them. The subscribers submitted with resignation; they had never had much faith in the long life of the newspaper, and perhaps they may have found the news therein contained rather stale. The newspaper died a natural death, and the editors were delighted to be quit of it.

Some little time after this, a new subject took possession of the minds of Harry and Pauline. It was at the time of the war of Prussia and Austria against Denmark. A good deal was said about it at La Ronceraye, the probable results were discussed, and the newspapers eagerly perused.

'Another skirmish! The Danes beaten! Poor things!'

'They have killed a good many Austrians!'

‘It is a shame that two great countries like that should wage war against such a little one as Denmark!’

The children’s attention was often arrested by such remarks as these. The cause of the war was of course unknown to them, but they saw their parents’ interest in the passing events, and they knew that Denmark was a little country, which Austria and Prussia were trying to possess themselves of.

This misuse of power raised their indignation. After breakfast one day, Elizabeth, Harry, Pauline, Catherine, and William followed their father and uncle into the drawing-room, to mark the relative positions of the two armies with little flags on a large map. No words can express their indignation when they saw the Austrians and Prussians advancing into a part of the map painted blue, which represented Denmark.

‘Pauline, will you come for a little walk?’ said Harry to his sister one morning.



All the subscribers duly received their copies.—P. 224.  
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He always confided all his secret plans to Pauline.

‘Those miserable Prussians have beaten the poor Danes again,’ he said, after a few commonplace remarks. ‘It is very sad, but the Danes will beat them in the end, and send them about their business.’

‘It is a shame those two big countries should join to fight poor little Denmark!’

‘I wonder if they know how cowardly and unjust it is! It’s just as if we were to join in fighting Gaston!’

‘I cannot think any one can have told them how cowardly it is! Every one ought to write to the King of Prussia and to the Emperor of Austria, and tell them so! I am sure they would soon end the war if we did.’

‘One letter would be quite enough, I think, to make them stop. They’re angry, that is why they can’t see that it is cowardly to want to take possession of poor little Denmark!’

‘Suppose we write to them, how would that do? We will not sign our letter; they don’t know us, so it would be no use; but if you like, you and I will write to them.’

‘Very well. What a good thing it would be if that could stop the war! Evidently they do not know what they are about!’

‘Presumptuous children!’ the reader will perhaps say. ‘Poor simple little things!’ would be more correct. Accustomed at home to uprightness and justice, they supposed the world to be rather better than it is. They thought in their innocence that a letter from two children would be the means of arresting a war, if the said children only said what was true, and cried shame upon a cowardly action. Not a dangerous illusion, and one that is not destined to last long!

The first difficulty that presented itself to the minds of the future scribes was how the letter should be sent. The post seemed too

ordinary a medium, and not a sufficiently secure one. Would the King of Prussia be sure to get all the letters addressed to him? The children were not certain of this, and it was a good deal on their minds. For several



days Pauline and Harry thought of nothing but their letter and the King of Prussia. They were always in close confab, but without result at first.

‘At all events, let’s write the letter,’ cried



Harry; 'when once it is written we shall find means of sending it. Have you a pen and ink in your room?'

'Of course; how could I do my exercises without?' answered Pauline.

The children were soon settled at the table. Harry was flushed with excitement; he was to be penman, and the feeling of his importance gave him an air of great dignity.

Harry began:—

'SIRE,—We have heard that you were carrying on' . . .

'And what about the Emperor of Austria?' cried Pauline; 'they are both doing so!'

'SIRE,—We have heard that you and the Emperor of Austria were carrying on a war with Denmark. It is extremely wrong of you.'

‘No, that will not do; they will be angry, and not finish reading the letter. Put something else.’

‘No; it is true.’

‘We do not understand, Sire, how two great countries like you and Austria can make war against a little one like Denmark; we think it is very cowardly’ . . .

‘Yes, you can put that; it is perfectly true!’

‘We suppose, Sire, that no one has represented to you what a cowardly action you are committing; if they had, you surely would have left off, so we write to beg you not to fight any more against poor little Denmark, it is *so* small: We do not ask you for an answer, but we should be so glad if you would leave off the war!’

Harry stopped all of a sudden, and struck his forehead :

‘I don’t know what it is, but it seems to me that the letters I have seen in the papers addressed to sovereigns were not like that.’

‘What do you mean ? Why, our letter will do very well.’

‘No ; there is something about it—something. Ah ! now I remember. When one addresses a king, one speaks in the third person.’

‘No, no ! Why should we do that ? we are not servants !’

‘No ; but every one speaks to them in the third person.’

‘I tell you only servants speak in the third person. I won’t have it !’

‘But suppose the King of Prussia gets into a rage ?’

‘When one writes to reproach people, there is no need to write in the third person.’

---

Our letter will do very nicely ; it only needs one thing. You must draw a little picture at the top of the page with two eagles devouring a lamb. That will have a very good effect.'

'All very well, but it is not an easy matter ; I don't know whether I shall be able.'

'Oh, yes! you must. It will make our letter look quite grand.'

After much labour and debate, the letter was at last finished. Harry copied it out in his most beautiful writing, and the little sketch ordered by Pauline adorned the top of the page. It was not splendid, but any one could see what it was intended for, and this was all the children cared for.

The letter was written, and now how was it to go? Pauline and Harry decided to send it simply by post ; so they folded it up, put it into an envelope, and shut it up in a drawer, little thinking what would be its after destiny.

At dinner-time, the conversation turned as usual upon the war. Harry, seated by his father, said, looking knowingly at his sister :

‘But, papa, if some one were to write a letter to tell them it is shameful for two countries to attack a small one, don’t you think that would put a stop to the war?’

There was a general laugh. Harry and Pauline looked at each other with consternation. Pauline signed to him to repeat his question.

‘I can answer for it, my dear boy, that neither one nor many letters would make much difference to the Emperor of Austria or King of Prussia. The only thing likely to do any good would be for France and England to declare war.’

‘To declare war!’ The children were quite disposed to do so; but when one has nothing but tin soldiers to fight with! . . .

‘Well, but, papa, they do not know what cowards they are!’

‘Don’t you think so? Well, letters will in no wise convince them of the fact, and they would pay very little attention to them.’

Without letting out their secret, more important than ever to keep, Harry and Pauline exchanged glances. Pauline’s eyes filled with tears, but not a word was said aloud, though she murmured: ‘So they will go on killing each other!’ Both children were thinking the same thing.

‘Nothing can be done with people who know they are cowards and do not mind it!’

Harry and Pauline took their letter and looked at it with emotion. Pauline burst out crying, but Harry managed to restrain his grief, and only wiped his eyes with the back of his hand.

‘I did so hope they would leave off!’ repeated Pauline.

‘I did not think any one could be so wicked!’ answered Harry.

The brother and sister threw their letter

into the grate, and set fire to it. Harry and Pauline lived to grow up, they had in their lives much to disappoint them, but never did they experience a more bitter deception than that which the King of Prussia gave them. They then understood for the first time that all the world was not good.





## CHAPTER XII.

### *SEPARATION.*

‘WHEN once we are safe in there, it will be no easy matter to find us!’

And Harry triumphantly planted the last branch of the roof of a palace. A sort of large hut in the form of a wigwam rose under two old limes at the bottom of the garden. Harry, William, and Gaston had been hard at work for three days, and the edifice, composed of reeds and branches, was at length



finished. Reading, working, and what not, might be carried on there, provided one made up one's mind to enter on all fours, for the door was low and narrow, and more like the entrance to a dog-kennel than to a palace.

'We must take great care to keep our secret, it will be such a convenient hiding-place!'

'Meanwhile we can give Gaston's nurse a good run. She is so fat, and doesn't like moving about, we shall be doing her a great service in shaking her up a little. Come, Gaston, creep into the hut. Be sure not to forget to pull down the great branch after you; if it is not in its place, all will be discovered!'

Gaston was delighted; with a merry laugh, he disappeared behind the reeds and branches.

'Now let's call Rose,' cried William.

On their way the two boys met the object of their search.

'Where's Master Gaston? The dinner-

bell will ring soon, and he is not ready. He has never been to dress.'

'Gaston? You had better look about for him. I saw him only a minute ago!'

Rose hunted and called in vain:

'Master Gaston! come and dress for dinner! Master Gaston!'

The echo was the only answer. Gaston was shaking with laughter in his leafy retreat. Harry's voice was heard in the distance, saying:

'Make haste, Rose, or Gaston will never be ready for dinner. Look about well.'

'I have hunted everywhere, Master Harry, but I can't find him.'

'Didn't he answer you when you called?'

'No.'

'It's very naughty of him! I tell you he is in the garden.'

Rose set off at a run, to the great joy of the boys, who followed her at a distance.

'Have you looked in our new hut?'

‘I’m going to look there now,’ answered Rose, out of breath.

‘We’ll come and help you.’

Harry and William had great difficulty to keep from laughing. They ran to the hut; the nurse was already leaving it.

‘Well, have you looked well in the hut?’

‘Yes, and he is not there. Master Gaston! Master Gaston!!—the bell will ring in a minute!’

‘I tell you he was there five minutes ago. You can’t have looked properly.’

Rose began searching the hut again; she moved the leaves about, but found nothing. Harry and William watched her closely.

‘Oh, the horror! she will pull out our principal branch!’

Rose drew back in a fright. She had, in reality, touched the branch about which Gaston had been so strongly cautioned.

‘You’d better go and see if Gaston is in the house; perhaps you will find him there!’

The poor girl, unaccustomed to running, was hot and out of breath, and began to be out of temper too.

‘I really wish Mistress would tie a string round Master Gaston’s leg,’ she cried in despair, ‘and then, at least, one would be able to find him!’

And off she went. Harry went into the hut.

‘You’re not suffocated?’ he said softly.

‘Not at all. Let her hunt a little longer; she did not choose to give me any sugar and water this morning, and she shall be made to repent it.’

Rose hunted and called, but no Gaston could she find. Advised by William, she returned a second time to the hut.

‘You were quite wrong about his not being there; I tell you he is. He was there a moment ago, and he is there still.’

‘Rose will have had more running about to-day than she generally has in a month. Let’s go in the hut.’

‘He isn’t there, Master Harry,’ said Rose, wiping her forehead.

‘What nonsense! I tell you he is!’

‘But he is bigger than a pin, and I see him nowhere!’

‘Ah! now I understand; you only looked in the large room, but there is an inner room, a double back to the hut. If you had only asked me, I could have told you!’

Harry looked so innocent that Rose did not dare to say anything. There was a movement at the back of the hut, an opening in the branches, and out came Gaston, who made for the house. His nurse followed him; she was in a fury, but was too exhausted to speak. Harry and William, roaring with laughter, threw themselves on the grass.

‘Isn’t she in a jolly heat? What a

deal of good this kind of thing does her !’

All at once the dinner-bell rang, finding them still at full length on the grass, neither washed nor dressed. They rapidly reached their rooms, but, in spite of all their haste, found every one at table by the time they came down.

‘Ah, my boy, when you are at school, you will have to be more punctual.’

‘At school, papa! Oh, when shall I go? —soon?’

‘When the classes meet again. Your mother and I have decided that it is time you worked with boys of your own age. There you will have no time to be idle. If you do not work, you will be at the bottom of the class.’

‘To school! oh, how jolly! I have so long wanted to go. Where shall I live?’

‘You will board with one of the professors, and you will follow the classes twice a day.

Mr. Bonard, in whose class you will be, is a very clever man. He is at the Lycée Bonaparte; several friends of mine send their sons to him.'

Harry could hardly contain himself, he felt inclined to toss his plate up in the air. He was very fond of La Ronceraye, but his first year at school seemed a delightful prospect, and his ardent imagination already saw himself carrying off a whole row of prizes. He forgot that he would have to work hard, and to part with all at home; for the present he only saw the sunny side of school life.

'Besides, I shall come home in the holidays,' he said, to comfort Pauline, who did not share his delight. 'When I come back we shall be so pleased to be together again, that we shall never quarrel!'

From this moment Harry thought of nothing but the new life before him; he was continually preparing for his departure,

though it was not to take place for a whole month.

‘Pauline, I shall want a new pen-wiper; do make me one. Elizabeth has worked me a pincushion, and mamma has given me a housewife, so that I may sew on my buttons myself.’

‘Fine sewing it will be!’

‘Not so bad as all that; I will show you what I can do!’

Harry seized his knife, and carefully undid one of his waistcoat buttons.

‘Now, I am going to sew it on again. Give me a needle and some very strong thread, and I shan’t be long about it.’

Harry made himself hot with his efforts to thread his needle, but all in vain.

‘Bother!’

And he seized the needle, broke it in two, and threw it out of the window. Pauline stood looking at him compassionately with folded arms.



‘Give me another needle!’ cried Harry.  
‘I’m not going to be conquered by a little bit  
of steel!’

And two other needles followed the first



out of the window for having dared to defy  
the future schoolboy. The next was less  
rash, and allowed itself to be threaded.

‘Hot work,’ said Pauline calmly.

‘I should think so!’ said Harry, wiping his forehead. ‘Plague the button, why ever did I take it off?’

At last the button was restored to its place, and Harry rose in triumph.

‘I shall never be a tailor,’ he said; ‘however can they have the patience to sew on so many buttons?’

‘Perhaps they sew quicker, or else they wouldn’t gain enough to eat,’ said Pauline mischievously.

Harry’s last day at home arrived. He was to start for Paris with his father. He was still in a great state of excitement, but not quite so exuberant, for his mother’s face was sad. It was the first time she had parted with any of her children, and though she had the highest confidence in Mr. Bonard, it was hard to send her son away to Paris, far from all his family. There was no help for it: La Ronceraye could not do without its master, nor Mrs. Aubry without her nephews.

‘You know, my boy, how I shall look for your letters, so don’t forget to write every week. I shall want to hear all your doings!’ said the mother, clasping her son to her.

‘I will be sure to write to you every Sunday morning, mamma!’

One more hug all round, and the travellers jumped into the carriage, the door was shut, the gravel crunched under the wheels, and the carriage was lost to view by a turn in the avenue. Harry was gone to begin a new life. Elizabeth and Pauline returned to the hall, where their mother was still standing, silently praying for her eldest son; she drew the two girls to her, and kissed them tenderly.

‘The best of girls is that they don’t go away. If one had nothing but boys, one would be left quite alone,’ she said.

Elizabeth and Pauline returned their mother’s caresses, then they went up-stairs into their room.

---



The farewell.—P. 250.



Harry's departure made a great blank in their life. Mr. de Flavier came back at the end of a week. Harry had begun to attend the classes ; he seemed highly delighted with



his schoolfellows, and Mrs. Bonard, who had lost a son of his age, seemed disposed to take him under her special charge. Three years later, William joined his brother at Mr.

Bonard's, where Gaston afterwards followed them. In the holidays, the boys returned to La Ronceraye, where all the echoes repeated their joyous cries. Mrs. Aubry, who was getting very old, said :

'I thought I was a little deaf, but these boys manage to make too much noise even for me!'

'I am getting so old that I shall soon forget how to laugh,' said Uncle Bernard.

'At all events,' said Elizabeth, 'you will never be too old to tease, Uncle.'

There was a general laugh. Elizabeth ran away to escape from her uncle, who wanted to chastise her for her impertinent speech ; the boys joined in the pursuit, which turned into a game of hide-and-seek by moonlight.

Mrs. de Flavie did not join in the game. She heard the merry laugh of her children as they ran to and fro in the moonlight. She thanked God with all her heart for having

given them to her, and she prayed Him to keep safe to the end those He had rendered so happy, and then to receive them in His heaven.





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